One Day

Prudence L. Harding

ONE DAY

A SEQUEL TO
"THREE WEEKS"

ANONYMOUS

NEW YORK
THE MACAULAY COMPANY

COPYRIGHT, 1909, BY
THE MACAULAY COMPANY

THE SCHILLING PRESS
NEW YORK

FOREWORD TO MY AMERICAN FRIENDS

Now after spending some very pleasant weeks in your interesting country, I feel sure that this book will find many sympathetic readers in America. Quite naturally it will be discussed; some, doubtless, will censure it —and unjustly; others will believe with me that the tale teaches a great moral lesson.

Born as the Boy was born, the end which Fate forced upon him, to me, was inevitable. Each word and act of the three weeks of his parents' love-idyl must reflect in the character and life of the child. Little by little the baby King grew before my mental vision until I saw at last there was no escape from his importunity and I allowed the insistent Boy—masterful even from his inception—to shape himself at his own sweet will. Thus he became the hero of my study.

FOREWORD

This is not a book for children or fools—but for men and women who can grasp the underlying principle of morality which has been uppermost in my mind as I wrote. Those who can see beyond the outburst of passion—the overmastering belief in the power of love to justify all things, which the Boy inherited so naturally from his Queen mother—will understand the forces against which the young Prince must needs fight a losing battle. The transgression was unavoidable to one whose very conception was beyond the law—the punishment was equally inevitable.

In fairness to this book of mine—and to me—the great moral lesson I have endeavored to teach must be considered in its entirety, and no single episode be construed as the book's sole aim. The verdict on my two years' work rests with you, dear Reader, but at least you may be sure that I have only tried to show that those who sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind.

—THE AUTHOR.

ONE DAY

CHAPTER I

THE Prince tore the missive fiercely from its envelope, and scowled at the mocking glint of the royal crown so heavily embossed at the top of the paper. What a toy it was, he thought, to cost so much, and eventually to mean so little! Roughly translated, the letter ran as follows:

"Your Royal Highness will be gratified to learn that at last a satisfactory alliance has been arranged between the Princess Elodie of Austria and your royal self. It is the desire of both courts and councils that the marriage shall be solemnized on the fifteenth of the May following your twenty-first birthday, at which time the coronation ceremony takes place that is to place the crown of the kingdom upon the head of the son of our beloved and ever-to-be-regretted Imperatorskoye. The Court and Council extend greetings and congratulations upon the not far distant ap-

proach of both auspicious events to your Royal Highness, which cannot fail to afford the utmost satisfaction in every detail to the ever-beautiful-and-never-to-be-sufficiently beloved Prince Paul.

"Imperator-to-be, we salute thee. We kiss thy feet."

The letter was sealed with the royal crest and signed by the Regent—the Boy's uncle—the Grand Duke Peter, his mother's brother, who had been his guardian and protector almost from his birth. The young prince knew that his uncle loved him, knew that the Grand Duke desired nothing on earth so much as the happiness of his beloved sister's only son—and yet at this crisis of the Boy's life, even his uncle was as powerless to help as was Paul Verdayne, the Englishman.

"The Princess Elodie!" he grumbled. "Who the devil is this Princess Elodie, anyway? Austrian blood has no particular charm for me! They might at least have told me something a little more definite about the woman they have picked out to be the mother of my children. A man usually likes to look an animal over before he purchases!"

Known to London society as Monsieur Zalen-

ska, the Prince had come up to town with the Verdaynes, and was apparently enjoying to the utmost the frivolities of London life.

At a fashionable garden party he sat alone, in a seclusion he had long sought and had finally managed to secure, behind a hedge of hawthorn where none but lovers, and men and women troubled as he was troubled, cared to conceal themselves.

The letter, long-expected and dreaded, had finally crossed the continent to his hand. It was only the written confirmation of the sentence Fate had pronounced upon him, even as it had pronounced similar sentences upon princes and potentates since the beginning of thrones and kingdoms.

While the Prince—or Paul Zalenska, as I will now call him—sat in his brooding brown study, clutching the imperial letter tightly in his young hand, his attention was arrested by the sound of voices on the other side of the hawthorn hedge.

He listened idly, at first, to what seemed to be a one-sided conversation, in a dull, emotionless feminine voice—a discourse on fashion, society

chit-chat, and hopeless nonentities, interspersed with bits of gossip. Could women never talk about anything else? he thought impatiently.

But his displeasure did not seem to affect the course of things at all. The voice, completely unconscious of the aversion it aroused in the invisible listener, continued its dreary, expressionless monotone.

"What makes you so silent, Opal? You haven't said a word to-day that you didn't absolutely have to say. If all American girls are as dreamy as you, I wonder why our English lords are so irresistibly attracted across the water when in search of brides!"

And then the Boy on the other side of the hedge felt his sluggish pulse quicken, and almost started to his feet, impelled by a sudden thrill of delight; for another voice had spoken—a voice of such infinite charm and sweetness and vitality, yet with languorous suggestion of emotional heights and depths, that he felt a vague sense of disappointment when the magnetic notes finally died away.

"Brides?" the voice echoed, with a lilt of girlish laughter running through the words. "You mean

'bribes,' don't you? For I assure you, dear cousin, it is the metallic clink of American gold, and nothing else, that lures your great men over the sea. As for my silence, *ma belle,* I have been uncommunicative because there really seemed nothing at all worth saying. I can't accustom myself to small-talk—I can't even listen to it patiently. I always feel a wild impulse to fly far, far away, where I can close my ears to it all and listen to my own thoughts. I'm sorry if I disappoint you, Alice—I seem to disappoint everybody that I would like to please—but I assure you, laugh at my dreams as you may, to me my dream-life is far more attractive and beautiful than what you term Life. Forgive me if I hurt you, cousin. I'm peculiarly constituted, perhaps, but I don't like this twaddle, and I can't help it! Everything in England is so beautiful, and yet its society seems so—so hopelessly unsatisfactory to one who longs to *live!"*

"To live, Opal? We are not dead, surely! What do you mean by life?"

And so her name was Opal! How curiously the name suited the voice! The Boy, as he listened,

felt that no other name could possibly have matched that voice—the opal, that glorious gem in which all the fires of the sun, the iridescent glories of the rainbow, and the cold brilliance of ice and frost and snow seemed to blend and crystallize. All this, and more, was in that mysteriously fascinating voice.

"To live, Alice?" echoed the voice again. "To live? Why, to live is to *feel!*—to feel every emotion of which the human soul is capable, to rise to the heights of love, and knowledge, and power; to sink—if need be—to the deepest depths of despair, but, at all costs, at all hazards, to *live!*—to experience in one's own nature all the reality and fullness of the deathless emotions of life!"

The voice sank almost to the softness of a whisper, yet even then was vibrant, alive, intense.

"Ah, Alice, from my childhood up, I have dreamed of life and longed for it. What life really is, each must decide for himself, must he not? Some, they say, sleep their way through a dreamless existence, and never, never wake to realities. Alice, I have sometimes wondered if that was to be my fate, have wondered and

wondered until I have cried out in real terror at the hideous prospect! Surely Fate could not be so cruel as to implant such a desperate desire in a soul that never was to know its fulfilment. Could it, Alice? Tell me, *could* it?"

The Boy held his breath now.

Who was this girl, anyhow, who seemed to express his own thoughts as accurately as he himself could have done? He was bored no longer. He was roused, stirred, awakened—and intensely interested. It was as though the voice of his own soul spoke to him in a dream.

The cold, lifeless voice now chimed in again. In his impatience the Boy clenched his fists and shut his teeth together hard. Why didn't she keep still? He didn't want to miss a single note he might have caught of the voice—that other! Why did this nonentity—for one didn't have to see her to be sure that she was that—have to interrupt and rob him of his pleasure?

"I don't understand you, Opal," she was saying. (Of course she didn't, thought the Boy—how could she?) "I am sure that I live. And yet I have never felt that way—thank goodness!

It's vulgar to feel too deeply, Mamma used to say, and as I have grown older, I can see that she was right. The best people never show any excess of emotion. That is for tragedy queens, operatic stars, and—the women we do not talk about! Ladies cultivate repose!"

("Repose!—*mon Dieu!*" thought Paul, behind the hedge. He wished that she would!)

"And yet, Alice, you are—married!"

"Married?—of course!—why not?" and the eavesdropper fancied he could see the wide-open gaze of well-bred English surprise that accompanied the words. "One has to marry, of course. That is what we are created for. But one doesn't make a fuss about it. It's only a custom—a ceremony—and doesn't change existence much for most women, if they choose sensibly. Of course there is always the chance of a *mésalliance!* A woman has to risk that."

"And you don't—love?"

The Boy was struck by a note that was almost horror in the opaline voice so near him.

"Love? Why, Opal, of course we do! It's easy to love, you know, when a man is decent and

half-way good to one. I am sure I think a great deal of Algernon: but I dare say I should have thought as much of any other man I had happened to marry. That is a wife's duty!"

"*Duty!*—and you call that love?" The horror in the tones had now changed to scorn.

"You have strange ideas of life, Opal. I should be afraid to indulge them if I were you—really I should! You have lived so much in books that you seem to have a very garbled idea of the world. Fiction is apt to be much of a fairy tale, a crazy exaggeration of what living really consists of!"

"*Afraid?* Why should I be afraid? I am an American girl, remember, and Americans are afraid of nothing—nothing! Come, cousin, tell to me, if you can, why I should be afraid."

"Oh, I don't know! really I don't!" There was a troubled, perplexed note in the English voice now. " Such notions are apt to get girls into trouble, and lead them to some unhappy fate. Too much 'life'—as you call it—must mean suffering, and sorrow, and many tears—and maybe, *sin!*"

There was a shocked note in the voice of the

young English matron as she added the last word, and her voice sank to a whisper. But Paul Zalenska heard, and smiled.

"Suffering, and sorrow, and many tears," repeated the American girl, musingly, "and maybe —sin!" Then she went on, firmly, "Very well, Alice, give me the suffering and sorrow, and many tears—and the sin, too, if it must be, for we are all sinners of greater or less degree—but at any rate, give me life! *My* life may still be far off in the future, but when the time comes, I shall certainly know, and—I shall *live!*"

"You are a peculiar girl, Opal, and—we don't say those things in England."

"No, you don't say those things, you cold English women! You do not even *feel* them! As for sin, Alice, to my mind there can be no worse sin under heaven than you commit when you give yourself to a man whom you do not love better than you could possibly love any other. Oh, it *is* a sin—it *must* be—to sell yourself like that! It's no wonder, I think, that your husbands are so often driven to 'the women we do not talk about' for—consolation!"

"Opal! Opal! hush! What *are* you saying? You really—but see! isn't that Algernon crossing the terrace? He is probably looking for us."

"And like a dutiful English wife, you mustn't fail to obey, I suppose! Lead the way, cousin mine, and I'll promise to follow you with due dignity and decorum."

And the rustle of silken skirts heralded the departure of the ladies away from the hedge and beyond Paul's hearing.

Then he too started at an eager, restless pace for the centre of the crowd. He had quite forgotten the future so carefully arranged for him, and was off in hot pursuit of—what? He did not know! He only knew that he had heard a voice, and—he followed!

As he rejoined the guests, he looked with awakened interest into every face, listened with eager intensity to every voice. But all in vain. It did not occur to him that he might easily learn from his hostess the identity of her American guest; and even if the thought had presented itself to him, he would never have acted upon it. The

experience was his alone, and he would have been unwilling to share it with any one.

He was no longer bored as earlier in the afternoon, and he carried the assurance of enthusiasm and interest in his every glance and motion. People smiled at the solitary figure, and whispered that he must have lost Verdayne. But for once in his life, the Boy was not looking for his friend.

But neither did he find the voice!

Usually among the first to depart on such occasions as these, this time he remained until almost all the crowd had made their adieux. And it was with a keen sense of disappointment that he at last entered his carriage for the home of the Verdaynes. He was hearing again and again in the words of the voice, as it echoed through his very soul, "When my time comes, I shall certainly know, and I shall—*live!*"

The letter in his pocket no longer scorched the flesh beneath. He had forgotten its very existence, nor did he once think of the Princess Elodie of Austria. What had happened to him?

Had he fallen in love with a—voice?

CHAPTER II

It was May at Verdayne Place, and May at Verdayne Place was altogether different from May in any other part of the world. The skies were of a far deeper and richer blue; the flowers reached a higher state of fragrant and rainbow-hued perfection; the sun shining through the green of the trees was tempered to just the right degree of shine and shadow. To an Englishman, home is the beginning and the end of the world, and Paul Verdayne was a typical Englishman.

To be sure, it had not always been so, but Paul had outlived his vagabond days and had become thoroughly domesticated; yet there had been a time in his youth when the wandering spirit had filled his soul, when the love of adventure had lent wings to his feet, and the glory of romance had lured him to the lights and shadows of other skies than these. But Verdayne was older now,

very much older! He had lived his life, he said, and settled down!

In the shade of the tall trees of the park, two men were drinking in the beauties of the season, in all the glory and splendor of its ever-changing, yet ever-enduring loveliness. One of them was past forty, the ripeness of middle age and the general air of a well-spent, well-directed, and fully-developed life lending to his face and form an unusual distinction—even in that land of distinguished men. His companion was a boy of twenty, straight and tall and proud, carrying himself with the regal grace of a Greek god. He was a strong, handsome, healthy, well-built, and well-instructed boy, a boy at whom any one who looked once would be sure to look the second time, even though he could not tell exactly wherein the peculiar charm lay. Both men were fair of hair and blue-eyed, with clear, clean skins and well-bred English faces, and the critical observer could scarcely fail to notice how curiously they resembled each other. Indeed, the younger of the pair might easily have been the replica of the elder's youth.

When they spoke, however, the illusion of resemblance disappeared. In the voice of the Boy was a certain vibrant note that was entirely lacking in the deeper tones of the man—not an accent, nor yet an inflection, but still a quality that lent a subtle suggestion of foreign shores. It was an expressive voice, neither languorous nor unduly forceful, but strangely magnetic, and adorably rich and full, and musical, thrilling its hearers with its suggestion of latent physical and spiritual force.

On the afternoon of which I write, those two were facing a crisis that made them blind to everything of lesser import. Paul Verdayne—the man—realized this to the full. His companion—the Boy—was dimly but just as acutely conscious of it. The question had come at last—the question that Paul Verdayne had been dreading for years.

"Uncle Paul," the Boy was saying, "what relation are you to me? You are not really my uncle, though I have been taught to call you so after this quaint English fashion of yours. I know it is something of a secret, but I know no more! We are closer comrades, it seems to me—you and I—

than any others in all the world. We always understand each other, somehow, almost without words—is it not so? I even bear your name, and I am proud of it, because it is yours. But why must there be so much mystery about our real relationship? Won't you tell me just what I am to you?"

The question, long-looked-for as it was, found the elder man all unprepared. Is any one ever ready for any dire calamity, however certainly expected? He paced up and down under the tall trees of the park and for a time did not answer. Then he paused and laid his hand upon the shoulder of the Boy with a tenderness of touch that proved better than any words how close was the bond between them.

"Tell you what you are to me! I could never, never do that! You are everything to me, everything!"

The Boy made a motion as if to speak, but the man forestalled him.

"We're jolly good friends, aren't we—the very best of companions? In all the world there is no man, woman or child that is half so near and dear

to me as you. Men don't usually talk about these things to one another, you know, Boy; but, though I am a bachelor, you see, I feel toward you as most men feel toward their sons. What does the mere defining of the relationship matter? Could we possibly be any more to each other than we are?"

Paul Verdayne seated himself on a little knoll beneath the shade of a giant oak. The Boy looked at him with the wistfulness of an infinite question in his gaze.

"No, no, Boy! Some time, perhaps—yes, certainly—you shall know all, all! But that time has not yet come, and for the present it is best that things should rest as they are. Trust us, Boy—trust *me*—and be patient!"

"Patient!" The Boy laughed a full, ringing laugh, as he threw himself on the grass at his companion's feet. "I have never learned the word! Could you be patient, Uncle Paul, when youth was all on fire in your heart, with your own life shrouded in mystery? Could you, I say, be patient then?"

Verdayne laughed indulgently as his strong fingers stroked the Boy's brown curls.

"Perhaps not, Boy, perhaps not! But it is for you," he continued, "for you, Boy, to make the best of that life of yours, which you are pleased to think clouded in such tantalizing mystery. It is for you to develop every God-given faculty of your being that all of us that love you may have the happiness of seeing you perform wisely and well the mission upon which you have been sent to this kingdom of yours to accomplish. Boy! every true man is a king in the might of his manhood, but upon you is bestowed a double portion of that universal royalty. This is a throne-worshipping world we are living in, Paul, and it means even more than you can realize to be a prince of the blood!"

The Boy looked around the park apprehensively. What if someone heard? For this straight young sapling, who was only the "Boy" to Paul Verdayne, was to the world at large an heir to a throne, a king who had been left in infancy the sole ruler of his kingdom.

His visits to Verdayne Place were *incognito.* He did like to throw aside the purple now and then and be the real live boy he was at heart. He

did enjoy to the full his occasional opportunities, unhampered by the trappings and obligations of royalty.

"A prince of the blood!" he echoed scornfully. "Bah!—what is that? Merely an accident of birth!"

"No, not an accident, Paul! Nothing in the world ever is that. Every fragment of life has its completing part somewhere, given its place in the scheme of the universe by intricate design—always by *design!* As for the duties of your kingdom, my Prince, it is not like you to take them so lightly."

"I know! I know! Yet everybody might have been born a prince. It is far more to be a man!"

"True enough, Boy! yet everybody might not have been born to your position. Only you could have been given the heritage that is yours! My Boy, yours is a mission, a responsibility, from the Creator of Life Himself. Everybody can follow —but only God's chosen few can lead! And you—oh, Boy! yours is a birthright above that of all other princes—if you only knew!"

The young prince looked wistfully upward into the eyes of the elder man.

"Tell me, Uncle Paul! Dmitry always speaks of my birth with a reverence and awe quite out of proportion to its possible consequence—poor old man. And once even the Grand Duke Peter spoke of my 'divine origin,' though he could not be coaxed or wheedled into committing his wise self any further. Now you, yourself the most reserved and secretive of individuals when it pleases you to be so, have just been surprised into something of the same expression. Do you wonder that I long to unravel the mystery that you are all so determined to keep from me? I can learn nothing at home—absolutely nothing! They glorify my mother—God bless her memory! Everyone worships her! But they never speak of you, and they are silent, too, about my father. They simply won't tell me a thing about him, so I don't imagine that he could have been a very good king! *Was* he, Uncle Paul? Did you know him?"

"I never knew the king, Boy!—never even saw him!"

"But you must have heard——"

"Nothing, Boy, that I can tell you—absolutely nothing!"

Verdayne had risen again and was once more pacing back and forth under the trees, as was his wont when troubled with painful memories.

"But my mother—you knew *her!*"

"Yes, yes—I knew your mother!"

"Tell me about her!"

A dull, hopeless agony came into the eyes of the older man. And so his Gethsemane had come to him again! Every life has this garden to pass through—some, alas! again and yet again! And Paul Verdayne had thought that he had long since drained his cup of misery to the dregs. He knew better now.

"Yes, I will tell you of your mother, Boy," he said, and there was a strained, guarded note in his voice which his companion's quick ear did not fail to catch. "But you must be patient if you wish to hear what little there is, after all, that I can tell you. You must remember, my Boy, that it is a long time since your mother—died—and men of my age sometimes—forget!"

"I will remember," the Boy said, gently.

But as he looked up into the face of his friend, something in his heart told him that Paul Verdayne did *not* forget! And somehow the older man felt confident that the Boy knew, and was strangely comforted by the silent sympathy between them which both felt, but neither could express.

"Your mother, Boy, was the noblest and most beautiful woman that ever graced a throne. Everyone who knew her must have said that! You are very like her, Paul—not in appearance, a mistake of Fate to be everlastingly deplored, but in spirit you are her living counterpart. Ah! you have a great example to live up to, Boy, in attempting to follow her footsteps! There was never a queen like her—never!"

The young prince followed with the deepest absorption the words of the man who had known his mother, hanging upon the story with the breathless interest of a child in some fairy tale.

"She knew life as it is given few women to know it. She was not more than thirty-five, I think, when you were born, but she had crowded into those years more knowledge of the world, in

all its myriad phases, than others seem to absorb during their allotted three score and ten. And her knowledge was not of the world alone, but of the heart. She was full of ideals of advancement, of growth, of doing and being something worthy the greatest endeavor, exerting every hope and ambition to the utmost for the future splendor of her kingdom—your kingdom now. How she loved you!—what splendid achievements she expected of you! how she prayed that you might be grand, and great, and true!"

"Did you always know her?"

"Always?—no. Only for three weeks, Boy!"

"Three weeks!—three little weeks! How strange, then, that you should have learned so much about her in that short space of time! She must indeed have made a strong impression upon you!"

"Impression, you say? Boy, all that I am or ever expect to become—all that I know or ever expect to learn—all that I have done or ever expect to accomplish—I owe to your mother. She was the one inspiration of my life. Until I knew her, I was a nonentity. It was she who awak-

ened me—who taught me how to live! Three weeks! Child! child!——"

He caught himself sharply and bit his lip, forcing back the impetuous words he had not meant to say. The silence of years still shrouded those mysterious three weeks, and the time had not yet come when that silence could be broken. What had he said? What possessed the Boy to-day to cling so persistently to this hitherto forbidden subject?

"Where did you meet her, Uncle?"

"At Lucerne!"

"Lucerne!" echoed the Boy, his blue eyes growing dreamy with musing. "That says nothing to me—nothing! and yet—you will laugh at me, I know, but I sometimes get the most tantalizing impression that I remember my mother. It is absurd, of course—I suppose I could not possibly remember her—and yet there is such a haunting, vague sense of close-clinging arms, of an intensely white and tender face bending over me—sometimes in the radiance of day and again in the soft shadows of night, but always, always alight with love—of kisses, soft and warm, and yet often tear-

ful—and of black, lustrous hair, over which there always seems to shine a halo—a very coronet of triumphant motherhood."

Verdayne's lips moved, but no sound came from them to voice the passionate cry in his heart, "My Queen, my Queen!"

"I suppose it is only a curious dream! It must be, of course! But it is a very real vision to me, and I would not part with it for the world. Uncle, do you know, I can never look upon the pictured face of a Madonna without being forcibly reminded of this vision of my mother—the mother I can see only in dreams!"

Verdayne found it growing harder and harder for him to speak.

"I do not think that strange, Boy. Others would not understand it, but I do. She was so intensely a mother that the spirit of the great Holy Mother must have been at all times hovering closely about her! Her deepest desires centred about her son. You were the embodiment of the greatest, sweetest joys—if not the only real joys—of her strangely unhappy life, and her whole thought, her one hope, was for you. In your soul

must live all the unrealized hopes and crucified ideals of the woman who, always every inch a queen, was never more truly regal than in the supreme hour that crowned her your mother."

"And am I like her, Uncle Paul? Am I really like her?"

"So much so, Boy, that she sometimes seems to live again in you. Like her, you believe so thoroughly in the goodness and greatness of a God—in the beauty and glory of the world fraught with lessons of life and death—in the omnipotence of Fate—in the truth and power and grandeur of overmastering love. You believe in the past, in all the dreams and legends of the Long Ago still relived in the Now, in the capabilities of the human mind, the kingship of the soul. Your voice is hers, every tone and cadence is as her own voice repeating her own words. Be glad, Paul, that you are like your mother, and hope that with the power to think her thoughts and dream her dreams, you may also have the power to love as she loved, and, if need be, die her death!"

"But you think the same thoughts, Uncle Paul. You believe all I believe!"

"Because she taught me, Paul—because she taught me! I slept the sleep of the blind and deaf and soulless until her touch woke my soul into being. You have always been alive to the joy of the world and the beauty of living. Your soul was born with your body and lived purposefully from the very beginning of things. You were born for a purpose and that purpose showed itself even in infancy."

A silence fell between the two men. A long time they sat in that sympathetic communion, each busy with his own thoughts. The older Paul was lost in memories of the past, for his life lay all behind him—the younger Paul was indulging in many dreams of a roseate future, for his life was all ahead of him.

It was a friendship that the world often wondered about—this strange intimacy between Paul Verdayne, the famous Member of Parliament, and the young man from abroad who called himself Paul Zalenska. None knew exactly where Monsieur Zalenska came from, and as they had long ago learned the futility of questioning either of the men about personal affairs, had at last recon-

ciled themselves to never finding out. Everyone suspected that the Boy was a scion of rank—and some went so far as to say of royalty, but beyond the fact that every May he came with his faithful, foreign-looking attendant to Verdayne Place and spent the summer months with the Verdayne family, nothing definite was actually known. His elderly attendant certainly spoke some beastly foreign jargon and went by the equally beastly foreign name of Vasili. He was known to worship his young master and to attend him with the most marked servility, but he was never questioned, and had he been, would certainly have told no tales.

The parents of Paul Verdayne—Sir Charles and Lady Henrietta—were very fond of their young guest, and made much of his annual visits. As for Paul himself, he never seemed to be perfectly happy anywhere if the young fellow were out of his sight.

He had made himself very much distinguished, had this Paul Verdayne. He had found out how to get the most out of his life and accomplish the utmost good for himself and his England with

the natural endowments of his energetic and ambitious personality. He had become a famous orator, a noted statesman, a man of brain as well as brawn. People were glad to listen when he talked. He inspired them with the idea—so nearly extinct in this day and age of the world—that life after all was very much worth the living. He stirred languid pulses with a dormant enthusiasm. He roused torpid brains to thought. He had ideas and had also a way of making other people share those ideas. England was proud of Paul Verdayne, as she had good reason to be. And he was only forty-three years old even now. What might he not accomplish in the future for the land to which he devoted all his talents, his tireless, well-directed activities?

He had given himself up so thoroughly to political interests that he had not taken time to marry. This was a great disappointment to his mother, Lady Henrietta, who had set her heart upon welcoming a daughter-in-law and a houseful of merry, romping grandchildren before the sun of her life had gone down forever. It was also a secret source of disappointment to certain younger

feminine hearts as well, who in the days of his youth, and even in the ripeness of later years, had regarded Paul Verdayne with eyes that found him good to look upon. But the young politician had never been a woman's man. He was chivalrous, of course, as all well-bred Englishmen are, but he kept himself as aloof from all society as politeness would permit, and the attack of the most skillfully aimed glances fell harmless, even unheeded, upon his impenetrable armor. He might have married wherever he had willed, but Society and her fair votaries sighed and smiled in vain, and finally decided to leave him alone, to Verdayne's infinite relief.

As for the Boy, he was always, as I have said, a mystery, always a topic for the consideration of the gossips. Every year since he was a little fellow six years old he had come to Verdayne Place for the summer; at first, accompanied by his nurse, Anna, and a silver-haired servant, curiously named Dmitry. Later the nurse had ceased to be a necessity, and the old servant had been replaced by Vasili, a younger, but no less devoted attendant. As the Boy grew older, he had learned

to hunt and took long rides with his then youthful host across the wide stretch of English country that made up the Verdayne estates and those of the neighboring gentry. Often they cruised about in distant waters, for the young fellow from his earliest years shared with the elder an absorbing love of nature in all her varied and glorious forms; and in February, always in February, Verdayne found time to steal away from England for a brief visit to that far-off country in the south of Europe from which the Boy came. Many remembered that Verdayne, like an uncle of his, Lord Hubert Aldringham, had been much given to foreign travel in his younger days and had made many friends and acquaintances among the nobility and royalty of other lands, and although it was strange, they thought it was not at all improbable that the lad was connected with some one of those great families across the Channel.

As for Paul and the Boy, they knew not what people thought or said, and cared still less. There was too strong a bond of *camaraderie* between them to be disturbed by the murmurings of a wind that could blow neither of them good or ill.

And the Boy was now twenty years of age.

Suddenly Paul Zalenska broke their long silence.

"Do you know, Uncle, I sometimes have a queer feeling of fear that my father must have done something terrible in his life—something to make strong men shrink and shudder at the thought—something—*criminal!* Oh, I dare not think of that!" he went on hastily. "I dare not—I dare not! I think the knowledge of it would drive me mad!"

His voice sank to a half-whisper and there was a note of horror in his words.

"But, what a king he must have been!—what a miserable apology for all that royalty should be by every law, human or divine! Why isn't his name heralded over the length and breadth of the kingdom in pæans of praise? Why isn't the whole world talking of his valor, his beneficence, his statesmanship? What is a king created a king for, if not to make history?"

He fought silently for a moment to regain his self-control, forcing the hideous idea from him

and at last speaking with an air of finality beyond his years.

"No, I won't think of it! May the King of the world endow me with the strength of the gods and the wisdom of the ancient seers, that I may make up by my efficiency for all my father's deplorable lack, and become all that my mother meant me to be when she gave me to the world!"

He stretched out his arms in a passionate appeal to Heaven, and Paul Verdayne, looking up at him, realized as he had never before that the Boy certainly had within him the stuff of which kings should be made.

The Boy was not going to disappoint him. He was going to justify the high hopes cherished for him so long. He was going to be a man after his mother's own heart.

"Uncle," went on the Boy, wrought up to a high pitch of emotion, and throwing himself down again at Verdayne's feet, "I feel with Louis XVI, 'I am too young to reign!' Why haven't I ever had a father to teach and train me in the way I should go? Every boy needs a good father, princes most of all, so much more is expected of us

poor royal devils than of more ordinary and more fortunate mortals! I know I shouldn' be complaining like this—certainly not to you, Uncle Paul, who have been all most fathers are to most boys! But there are times, you know, when you persist in keeping me at arm's length as you keep everyone else! When you put up that sign, 'Thus far and no further!' I feel myself almost a stranger! Won't you let me come nearer? Won't you take down that barrier between us and let me have a father—at least, in name? I'm tired of calling you 'Uncle' who uncle never was and never could be! You're far more of a father—really you are! Let me call you in name what you have always been in spirit. Let me say 'Father Paul!' I like the sound of it, don't you? 'Father Paul!' —'Father Paul!' "

Paul Verdayne felt every drop of blood leave his face. He felt as if the Boy had inadvertently laid a cold hand upon his naked heart, chilling, paralyzing its every beat. What did he mean? The Boy was just then looking thoughtfully at the setting sun and did not see the change that his words

called into his companion's face—thank heaven for that!—but what *could* he mean?

"You can call yourself my 'Father Confessor,' you know, if you entertain any scruples as to the propriety of a staid old bachelor's fathering a stray young cub like me—that will make it all right, surely! You will let me, won't you? In all the world there is no one so close to me as you, and such dreams as I may happily bring to fulfillment will be, more than you know, because of your guidance, your inspiration. You are the father of my spirit, whoever may have been the father of my flesh! Let it be hereafter, then, not 'Uncle,' but 'Father Paul'!"

And the older man, rising and standing by the Boy, threw his arm around the young shoulders, and gazing far off to the distant west, felt himself shaken by a strange emotion as he answered, "Yes, Boy, hereafter let it be 'Father Paul!'"

And as the sun travelled faster and faster toward the line of its crossing between the worlds of night and day, its rays reflected a new radiance upon the faces of the two men who sat in the silent shadows of the park, feeling themselves

drawn more closely together than ever before, thinking, thinking, thinking—in the eyes of the man a great memory, in the eyes of the Boy a great longing for life!

* * * * * *

The two friends ran up to London for the theatre that night, to see a famous actor in a popular play, but neither was much interested in the performance. Something had kindled in the heart of the man a reminiscent fire and the Boy was thinking his own thoughts and listening, ever listening.

"I'm several kinds of a fool," he thought, "but I'd like to hear that voice again and get a glimpse of the face that goes with it. I dare say she is anything but attractive in the flesh—if she is really in the flesh at all, which I am beginning to doubt—so I should be disenchanted if I were to see her, I suppose. But I'd like to *know!*" Yet, after all, he could not comprehend how such a voice could accompany an unattractive face. The spirit that animated those tones must needs light up the most ordinary countenance with character.

if not with beauty, he thought; but he saw no face in the vast audience to which he cared to assign it. No, *she* wasn't there. He was sure of that.

But as they left the building and stood upon the pavement, awaiting their carriage, his blood mounted to his face, dyeing it crimson. In the sudden silence that mysteriously falls on even vast crowds, sometimes, he heard that voice again!

It was only a snatch of mischievous laughter from a brougham just being driven away from the curb, but it was unmistakably *the* voice. Had the Boy been alone he would have followed the brougham and solved the mystery then and there.

The laugh rang out again on the summer evening air. It was like a lilt of fairies' merriment in the moonlit revels of Far Away! It was the note of a siren's song, calling, calling the hearts and souls of men! It was— But the Boy stopped and shook himself free from the "sentimental rot" he was indulging in.

He turned with a question on his lips, but Verdane had noticed nothing and the Boy did not speak.

Still that laugh thrilled and mocked him all the way to Berkeley Square and lured him on and on through the night's mysterious dreams.

CHAPTER III

IN the drawing room of her mansion on Grosvenor Square, Lady Alice Mordaunt was pouring tea, and talking as usual the same trifling commonplaces that had on a previous occasion excited her cousin's disdain. Opposite her sat her mother, Lady Fletcher, a perfect model of the well-bred English matron, while Opal Ledoux, in the daintiest and fluffiest of summer costumes, was curled up like a kitten in a corner of the window-seat, apparently engrossed in a book, but in reality watching the passers-by.

From her childhood up she had lived in a Castle of Dreams, which she had peopled with the sort of men and women that suited her own fanciful romantic ideas, and where she herself was supposed to lie asleep until her ideal knight, the Prince Charming of the story, came across

land and sea to storm the Castle and wake her with a kiss.

It was made up of moonbeams and rays of sunshine and rainbow-gleams—this dream—woven by fairy fingers into so fragile a cobweb that it seemed absurd to think it could stand the winds and torrents of Grown-Up Land; but Opal, in spite of her eighteen years, was still awaiting the coming of her ideal knight, though the stage setting of the drama, and her picture of just how the Prince Charming of her dreams was to look, and what he would say, had changed materially with the passing of the years.

If sometimes she wove strange lines of tragedy throughout the dreams, out of the threads of shadow that flitted across the sunshine of her life, she did not reject them. She felt they belonged there and did not shrink, even when her young face paled at the curious self-pity the passing of the thought invoked.

Hers was a strange mixture, made up of an unusual intermingling of many bloods. Born in New Orleans, of a father who was a direct descendant of the early French settlers of Louis-

iana, and of a Creole mother, who might have traced her ancestry back to one of the old grandees of Spain, she yet clung with a jealous affection to the land of her birth and called herself defiantly "a thorough-bred American!" Her mother had died in giving her birth, and her father, while she was still too young to remember, had married a fair Englishwoman who had tried hard to be a mother to the strange little creature whose blood leaped and danced within her veins with all the fire and romance of foreign suns. Gay and pleasure-mad as she usually appeared, there was always the shadow of a heartache in her eye, and one felt the possibility of a tragedy in her nature. In fact one felt intuitively sorry—almost afraid—for her lest her daring, adventurous spirit should lead her too close to the precipice along the rocky pathway of life.

She was thinking many strange thoughts as she sat looking out of the window. Her English cousins, related to her only through her stepmother, yet called kin for courtesy's sake, had given up trying to understand her complexities,

as she had likewise given up trying to explain herself. If they were pleased forever to consider her in the light of a conundrum, she thought, why—let them!

After a while the ladies at the tea-table began to chat in more confidential tones. Opal was not too oblivious to her surroundings to notice, nor to grasp the fact that they were discussing her, but that knowledge did not interest her. She was so used to being considered a curiosity that it had ceased to have any special concern for her. She only hoped that they would sometime succeed in understanding her better than she had yet learned to understand herself. It might have interested her, however, had she overheard this particular conversation, for it shed a great light upon certain shades of character she had discovered in herself and often wondered about, but had never had explained to her.

But she did not hear.

"I am greatly concerned about Opal," Lady Alice was saying. "She is the most difficult creature, Mamma—you've no idea how peculiar

—with the most dangerous, positively *immoral* ideas. I do wish she were safely married, for then—well, there is really no knowing what might happen to a girl who thinks and talks as she does. I used to think it might be a sort of American pose—put on for startling effect, you know—but I begin to think she actually means it!"

"Yes, she means it," replied Lady Fletcher, lowering her voice discreetly, till it was little more than a whisper. "She has always had just such notions. It gives Amy a great deal of trouble and worry to keep her straight. You know—or perhaps you didn't know, for we don't talk of these things often, especially when they are in one's family—but there is a bad strain in her blood and they are always looking for it to crop out somewhere. Her mother married happily—and escaped the curse—but for several generations back the women of her family have been of peculiar temperament and—they've usually gone wrong sometime in their lives. It seems to be in the blood. They can't help it. Mr. Ledoux told Amy all about it at the time

of their marriage, and that is the reason they have tried to keep Opal as secluded as possible from the usual free-and-easy associations of American girls, and are so anxious to marry her off wisely."

"And speedily," put in Alice—"the sooner the better!"

"Yes, yes—speedily!"

Lady Fletcher gave an uneasy glance in Opal's direction before she continued.

"You are too young to have heard the story, Alice, but her grandmother—a black-eyed Spanish lady of high rank—was made quite unpleasantly notorious by her associations with a brother of Lady Henrietta Verdayne. He was an unprincipled roué—this Lord Hubert Aldringham—a libertine who openly boasted of the conquests he had made abroad. Being appointed to many foreign posts in the diplomatic service, he was naturally on intimate terms with people of rank and royalty. They say he was very fascinating, with the devil's own eye, and ten times as devilish a heart——"

"Why, Mamma!"

Alice was shocked.

"I am only repeating what they said, child," apologized the elder woman meekly. "Women will be fools, you know, over a handsome face and a tender voice—some women, I mean—and that's what Opal has to fight against."

"Poor Opal," murmured Alice, "I did not know!"

"Some even go so far as to say——"

Again Lady Fletcher looked up apprehensively, but Opal was still absorbed in her dreams.

"To say—what, Mother?

"Well, of course it's only talk—nobody can actually *know,* I suppose, and I wouldn't, of course, be quoted as saying anything for the world, dear knows; but they say that it is more than probable that Opal's mother was . . . *Lord Hubert's own daughter!"*

"Oh, Mother! If it is true—if it *could* be true—what a fight for her!"

"Yes, and the worst of it is with Opal, she won't fight. She has been rigidly trained in the principles of virtue and propriety from her very

birth, and yet she horrifies every one at times by shocking ideas—that no one knows where she gets, nor, worse yet, where they may lead!"

"But she is good, Mother. She has the noblest ideas of charity and kindness and altruism, of the advancement of all that's good and true in the world, of the attainment of knowledge, of the beauties and consolation of religion. It's fine to hear her talk when she's inspired—not a bit preachy, you know—she's certainly far enough from that—but more like reading some beautiful poem you can but half understand, or listening to music that makes you wish you were better, whether you take in its full meaning or not."

This was a long speech for Lady Alice. Her mother looked at her in amazement. There certainly must be something out of the ordinary in this peculiar American cousin to wake Alice from her customary languor.

Alice smiled at her mother's surprise.

"Strange, isn't it, Mother?" she asked, half ashamed of her unusual enthusiasm. "But it's true. She'd help some good man to be a power

in the world. I feel it so often when she talks. I didn't know women ever thought such things as she does. I—I—I believe we can trust her, Mother, to steer clear of everything!"

"I hope so, Alice; I am sure I hope so, but—I don't know. I am afraid it was a mistake to keep her so much alone. It gives her more unreal ideas of life than actual contact with the world would have done."

Opal Ledoux left the window and sauntered down the long drawing-room toward the table where the speakers were sitting.

"What are you talking about?—me?"

The cousins were surprised and showed it by blushing guiltily.

Opal laughed merrily.

"Dreary subject for a dreary day! I hope you found it more interesting than I have!" And she stretched her small figure to its utmost height, which was not a bit above five foot, and shrugged her shoulders lazily.

"What are you reading, Opal?" asked Lady Fletcher, in an effort to change the subject, look-

ing with some interest at the volume that the girl carried.

"Don't ask me—all twaddle and moonshine! I ought not to waste my valuable time with such trash. There isn't a real character in the book, not one. When I write a book, and I presume I shall some time, if I live long enough, I shall put people into it who have real flesh and blood in them and who do startling things. But I'll have to live it all first!"

"Live the startling things, Opal? God forbid!"

"Surely! Why not?"

And Opal dropped listlessly into a chair, tossed the offending book on a table, and taking a cup of tea from the hand of her cousin, began to sip it with an air of languid indifference, which sat strangely on her youthful, almost childlike figure.

"By the way, Alice," she asked carelessly, "who was the young man who stared at us so rudely last night as we drove away from the theatre?"

"I saw no young man staring, Opal. Where was he?"

"Why, he stood on the pavement, waiting, I suppose, for his carriage, and as we drove away he looked at me as though he thought I had no right to live, and still less to laugh—I believe I was laughing—and as we turned the corner I peeped back through the curtain, and he still stood there in the full glare of the light, staring. It's impolite, cousins—*very! Gentlemen* don't stare at girls in America!"

"What did he look like, Opal?" asked Lady Fletcher.

"Like a Greek god!" answered the girl, without a second's hesitation.

"What!"

Both women gasped, simultaneously. They were dismayed.

"Oh, don't be shocked! He had the full panoply of society war-paint on. He was certainly properly clothed, but as to his being in his right mind, I have my doubts—serious doubts! He stared!"

"I hope you didn't stare at him, Opal!"

"Well, I did! What could he expect? And I laughed at him, too! But I don't believe he saw me at all, more's the pity. I am quite sure he would have fallen in love with me if he had!"

"Opal!"

Opal was thoroughly enjoying herself now. She did enjoy shocking people who were so delightfully shockable!

"Why, *'Opal'?"* and her mimicry was irresistible. "Don't you think I'm a bit lovable, cousin?—not a bit? You discourage me! I'm doomed to be a spinster, I suppose! Ah, me! And I'd far rather be the spinster's cat! Cats aren't worried about the conventions and all that sort of thing. Happy animals! While we poor two-footed ones they call human—only we aren't really more than half so—have to keep our claws well hidden and purr hypocritically, no matter how roughly the world rubs our fur the wrong way, nor how wild we are to scratch and spit and bristle! Wouldn't you like to be a cat, Alice?"

"Goodness, child! What an idea! I am very

well contented, Opal, with the sphere of life into which I have been placed!"

"Happy, happy Alice! May that state of mind endure forever! But come! Haven't you an idea, either of you, who my Knight of the Stare can be?"

"You didn't describe him, Opal."

Opal opened her eyes in wide surprise.

"Didn't I? Why, I thought I did, graphically! A Greek god, dressed *en règle.* What more do you want? I am sure anyone ought to recognize him by that."

Her listeners looked at her in real consternation, which she was quick to see. Her eyes danced.

"Well, if you insist upon details, I can supply a few, I guess, if I try. I am really dying of curiosity to know who he is and why he stared. Of course I didn't look at him very closely. It wouldn't have been—er—what do you call it?—proper. And of course I could not see clearly at night, anyway. But I did notice he was about six feet tall. Imagine me, poor little me, looking up to six feet! With broad shoulders; an

athletic, muscular figure, like a young Hercules; a well-shaped head, like Apollo's, covered with curls of fair hair; a smooth, clear skin, with the tint of the rose in his cheek that deepened to blood-red when his blue eyes, in which the skies of all the world seemed to be mirrored, stared with an expression like that of a man upon whom the splendor of some glorious Paradise was just dawning. He looked like an Englishman, yet something in his attitude and general appearance made me think that he was not. His hands——"

"Opal! Opal! What do you mean? How could you see so much of a young man in so short a time? And at night, too?"

Opal pouted.

"You wanted a detailed description. I was trying to give it to you. As I told you at the start, I couldn't see much. But anyway, he stared!"

"And I dare say he wasn't the only one who stared!" put in Lady Alice in dry tones of reprehension. "I can't imagine who it could be, can you, mother?"

"Not unless it was that strange young Monsieur Zalenska—*Paul* Zalenska, I believe he calls himself—Paul Verdayne's guest. I rather think, from the description, that it must have been he!"

"Zalenska? What a name! I wonder if he won't let me call him 'Paul!' " said the incorrigible Opal, musingly. "I shall ask him the first time I see him. Paul's a pretty name! I like that—but I'll never, never be able to twist my tongue around the other. He'd get out of hearing before I could call him and that would never do at all! But 'Monsieur,' you say? Why 'Monsieur'? He certainly doesn't look at all like a Frenchman!"

"No one knows what he is, Opal; nor who. That is, no one but the Verdaynes. He has always made a mystery of himself."

Opal clapped her small hands childishly.

"Charming! My ideal knight in the flesh! But how shall I attract him?"

She knitted her brows and pondered as seriously as though the fate of nations depended upon her decision.

"Shall I send him my card, Alice, and ask him to call? Or would it be better to make an appointment with him for the Park? Perhaps a 'personal' in the *News* would answer my purpose—do you think he reads the *News,* or would the *Times* be better? Come, cousins, what do you think? I am so young, you know! Please advise me."

She clasped her hands in a charming gesture of helpless appeal and the ladies looked at one another in horrified silence. What unheard of thing would this impossible girl propose next! They would be thankful when they saw her once more safely embarked for the "land of the free," and out from under their chaperonage, they hoped, forever. They realized that she was quite beyond their restraining powers. Had she no sense of decency at all?

The door opened, callers were announced, and the day was saved.

Opal straightened up, put on what she called her "best dignity" and comported herself in so very well-bred and amiable a manner that her cousins quite forgave all her past delinquencies

and smiled approval upon the charming courtesy she extended to their guests. She could be *such* a lady when she would! No one could resist her! And yet they felt themselves sitting upon the crater of a volcano liable to erupt at any moment. One never felt quite safe with Opal.

But, much to their surprise and relief, everything went beautifully, and the guests departed, delighted with Lady Alice's "charming American cousin, so sweet, so dainty, so witty, so brilliant, and altogether lovely—really quite a dear, you know!"

But for all that, Lady Alice Mordaunt and Lady Fletcher were far from feeling easy over their guest, and ardently wished that the girl's father would cut short his visit to France and return to take her back with him to America. And while these two worthy ladies worried and fretted, Opal Ledoux laughed and dreamed.

And in a big mansion over in Berkeley Square Monsieur Paul Zalenska wondered—and listened.

CHAPTER IV

It was a whole two weeks after the Boy's experience at the theatre, and though the echoes of that mysterious voice still rang through all his dreams at night, and most of his waking hours, he had not heard its lilt again.

Paul Verdayne smiled to himself to note the youngster's sudden interest in society. He had not—strange as it may seem—been told a word of the experience, but he was not curious. He certainly knew the world, if anyone knew it, and though he was sure he recognized the symptoms, he had too much tact to ask, "Who is the girl?"

"Let the Boy have his little secrets," he thought, remembering his own callow days. "They will do him good."

And though the Boy felt an undue sense of guilt, he continued to keep his lips closed and his eyes and ears open, though it often seemed

so utterly useless to do so. Sometimes he wondered if he had dropped to sleep, there behind the hawthorn hedge that afternoon, and dreamed it all.

Verdayne and the Boy were sitting at luncheon at the Savoy. Sir Charles and Lady Henrietta had gone down to Verdayne Place for a week, and the two men were spending most of their time away from the lonely house in Berkeley Square.

That day they were discussing the Boy's matrimonial prospects as proposed by the Grand Duke Peter—indeed, they were usually discussing them. The Boy had written, signifying his acceptance and approval of the arrangements as made. Nothing else was expected of him for the present, but his nature had not ceased its revolt against the decree of Fate, and Paul Verdayne shared his feeling of repugnance to the utmost. Perhaps Verdayne felt it even more acutely than the young Prince himself, for he knew so much better all that the Boy was sacrificing. But he also knew, as did the poor royal victim himself, that it was inevitable.

"I don't wonder at the court escapades that occasionally scandalize all Europe," said the Boy. "I don't wonder at all! The real wonder is that more of the poor slaves to royalty do not snap the chains that bind them, and bolt for freedom. It would be like me,—very like me!"

And Verdayne could say nothing. He knew of more reasons than one why it would be very like the Boy to do such a thing, and he sighed as he thought that some time, perhaps, he might do it. And yet he could not blame him!

"Father Paul," went on the Boy, his thoughts taking a new turn, "you are a bachelor—a hopeless old bachelor—and you have never told me why. Of course there's a woman or two in it! We have talked about everything else under the sun, I think—you and I—but, curiously enough, we have never talked of love! Yet I feel sure that you believe in it. Don't you, Father Paul? Come now, confess! I am in a mood for sentiment to-day, and I want to hear what drove you to a life of single blessedness—what made my romantic old pal such a confirmed old celibate! I don't believe that you object to matrimony on

general principles. Tell me your love-story, please, Father Paul."

"What makes you so certain that I have had one, Boy?"

"Oh, I don't know just why, but I am certain! It's there in your lips when you smile, in your eyes when you are moved, in your voice when you allow yourself to become reminiscent. You are full of memories that you have never spoken of to me. And now, Father Paul—now is the accepted time!"

For a moment Verdayne was nonplussed. What could he reply? There was only one love-story in his life, and that one would end only with his own existence, but he could not tell that story to the Boy—yet! Suddenly, however, an old, half-forgotten memory flashed across his mind. Of course he had a love-story. He would tell the Boy the story of Isabella Waring.

So, as they sat together over their coffee and cigarettes, Verdayne told his young guest about the Curate's daughter, who had all unconsciously wielded such an influence over the

events of his past life. He told of the girl's kindness to him when he had broken his collar-bone; of her assistance so freely offered to his mother; of her jolly, lively spirits, her amiable disposition and general gay good-fellowship; and then of the unlucky kiss that had aroused the suspicion and august displeasure of Lady Henrietta, and had sent her erring son a wanderer over the face of Europe—to forget!

He painted his sadness at leaving home—and Isabella—in pathetic colors. Indeed, he became quite affecting when he pictured his parting with Isabella, and when in repeating his parting words, he managed to get just the right suspicion of a tremble into his voice, he really felt quite proud of his ability as a story-teller.

The Boy was plainly touched.

"What foolishness to think that such a love as yours could be cured merely by sending you abroad!" he said.

"Just what I thought, Boy—utter folly!"

"Of course it didn't cure you, Father Paul. You didn't learn to forget, did you? Oh, it was cruel to send you away when you loved her like

that! I didn't think it of Aunt Henrietta—I didn't indeed!"

"Oh, you mustn't blame mother, Boy. She meant it for the best, just as your Uncle Peter now means it for the best for you and yours. She thought I would forget."

"Was she very, very beautiful, Father Paul? But of course she was, if *you* loved her!"

"She was pretty, Boy—at least I thought so."

"Big or little?"

"Tall—very tall."

"I like tall, magnificent women. There's something majestic about them. I hope the Princess Elodie"—and the Boy made a wry face—"will be quite six foot tall. I could never love a woman small either in body or mind. I am sure I should have liked your Isabella, Father Paul. Majestic women of majestic minds for me, for there you have the royal stamp of nature that makes some women born to the purple. Yes, I am sure I should have liked Isabella. Tell me more."

Paul Verdayne smiled. He should hardly

have considered Isabella Waring in any degree "majestic"—but he did not say so.

"She was charmingly healthy and robust—athletic, you know, and all that—with light fluffy hair. I believe she used to wear it in a net. Blue eyes, of course—thoroughly English, you know—and a fine comrade. Liked everything that I liked, as most girls at that age didn't, naturally. Of course, mother couldn't appreciate her. She wasn't her style at all. And she naturally thought—mother did, I mean—that when she sent me away 'for my health' "—the Boy smiled—"that I'd forget all about her."

Verdayne began to think he wasn't telling it well after all. He looked out of the window. It was getting hard to meet the frank look in the Boy's blue eyes.

"Forget!" and there was a fine scorn in the tones of the young enthusiast. "But you didn't! you didn't! I'm sure you didn't!"

The romantic story appealed strongly to the Boy's mood.

"But why didn't you marry her when you came back, Father Paul? Did she die?"

"No, she didn't die. She is still living, I believe."

"Then why didn't you marry her, Father Paul? Did they still oppose it? Surely when you came home and they saw you had not forgotten, it was different. Tell me how it was when you came home."

And Paul Verdayne, in a voice he tried his best to make very sad and heart-broken, replied with downcast eyes, "When I came home, Boy, I found Isabella Waring ready to marry a curate, and happy over the prospect of an early wedding. So, you see, my share in her life was over."

The Boy's face fell. He had not anticipated this ending to the romance. How could any woman ever have proved faithless to his Father Paul! And how could he, poor man, still keep his firm, dauntless belief in the goodness and truth of human nature after so bitter an experience as this! It shocked his sense of right and justice—this story. He wished he had not asked to hear it.

"Thank you for telling me, Father Paul. It

was kind of you to open your past life to me like this, and very unkind of me to ask what I should have known would cost you such pain to tell. I am truly sorry for it all, Father Paul. Thank you again—and forgive me!"

"It's a relief to open one's heart, sometimes, to one who can sympathize," replied Verdayne, with a deep sigh. But he felt like a miserable hypocrite.

Poor Isabella Waring! He had hardly given her a passing thought in twenty years. And now he had vilified her to help himself out of a tight corner. Well, she was always a good sort. She wouldn't mind being used—or even misused—to help out her "old pal" this way. Still it made him feel mean, and he was glad when the Boy dropped the subject and turned again to his own difficulties.

But the mind of the young prince was restive, that day. Nothing held his attention long. It seemed, like his eye, to be roving hither and thither, seeking something it never could find.

"You have been to America, Father Paul, haven't you?" he asked.

America? Yes, Verdayne had been to America. It was in America that he had passed one season of keenest anguish. He had good reason to remember it—such good reason that in all their wanderings about the world he had never seen fit to take the Boy there.

But something had aroused the young fellow's passing interest, and now nothing would satisfy him save that he must hear all about America; and so, for a full hour, as best he could, Verdayne described the country of the far West as he remembered it.

"Nothing in America appealed to me so strongly as the gigantic prairies," he said at last. "You were so deeply moved by our trip to Africa, Boy, that you must remember the impression of vastness and infinity the great desert made upon us. Well, in the glorious West of America it is as if the desert had sprung to life, and from every grain of sand had been born a blade of grass, waving and fluttering with the joy of new birth. Oh, it is truly wonderful, Paul! Once I went there with the soil of my heart scorched as dry and lifeless as the burning

sands of Sahara, but in that revelation of a new creation, some pulse within me sprang mysteriously into being again. It could never be the same heart that it once was, but it would now know the semblance of a new existence. And I took up the burden of life again—albeit a strange, new life—and came home to fight it out. The prairies did all that for me, Boy!" He paused for a moment, and then spoke in a sadder tone. "It was soon after that, Paul, that I first found you."

Paul Zalenska thought that he understood. That, of course, was after Isabella Waring had wrecked his life. Cruel, heartless Isabella! He had never even heard her name before to-day, but he hated her, wherever she might be!

"There is a legend they tell out there that is very pretty and appropriate," went on Verdayne, dreamily. "They say that when the Creator made the world, He had indiscriminately strewn continents and valleys, mountains and seas, islands and lakes, until He came to the western part of America, and despite His omnipotence, was puzzled to know what new glories He could

possibly contrive for this corner of the earth. Something majestic and mighty it must be, He thought, and yet of an altogether different beauty from that in the rest of the universe—something individual, distinctive. The seas still overflowed the land, as they had through past eternities, awaiting His touch to call into form and being the elements still sleeping beneath the water—the living representation of His thought. Suddenly stretching out His rod, He bade the waters recede—and they did so, leaving a vast extent of grassy land where the majestic waves had so lately rolled and tossed. And it is said that the land retains to this day the memory of the sea it then was, while the grasses wave with a subtle suggestion of the ocean's ebb and flow beneath the influence of a wind that is like no other wind in the world so much as an ocean breeze; while the gulls, having so well learned their course, fly back and forth as they did before the mystic change from water into earth. Indeed, the first impression one receives of the prairie is that of a vast sea of growing vegetation!"

The Boy's eyes sparkled. This was the fanciful Father Paul that he loved best of all.

"Some time we must go there, Father Paul. "Is it not so?"

"Yes, Boy, some time!"

CHAPTER V

REBELLIOUS thoughts were flitting through the brain of Paul Zalenska as he rode forth the next morning, tender and fanciful ones, too, as he watched the sun's kisses fall on leaf and flower and tree, drying with their soft, insistent warmth the tears left by the dew of night, and wooing all Nature to awake—to look up with glorious smiles, for the world, after all, is beautiful and full of love and laughter.

Why should *not* Paul be happy? Was he not twenty, and handsome, and rich, and popular, and destined for great things? Was there a want in the world that he could not easily have satisfied, had he so desired? And was he not officially betrothed to the Princess Elodie of Austria——

"Damn the Princess Elodie!" he thought,

with more emphasis than reverence, and he rode along silently, slowly, a frown clouding his fresh, boyish brow, face to face with the prose of the existence he would fain have had all romance and poetry.

It had all been arranged for him by well-meaning minds—minds that could never see how the blessing they had intended to bestow might by any chance become a curse.

The Boy came of age in February next—February nineteenth—but it had been the strongly expressed wish of his mother that his coronation should not take place until May.

For was it not in May that she had met her Paul?

She had felt, from the birth of the young Prince, a presentiment of her own early death, and had formed many plans and voiced many preferences for his future. No one knew what personal reasons the Imperatorskoye had for the wish, but she had so definitely and unmistakably made the desire known to all her councillors that none dreamed of disobeying the mandate of their deceased and ever-to-be-lamented Queen.

Her slightest wish had always been to them an unassailable law.

So the coronation ceremonies were to take place in the May following the Prince's birthday, and the Regent had arranged that the marriage should also be celebrated at that time. Of course, the Boy had acquiesced. He saw no reason to put it off any longer. It was always best to swallow your bitterest pill first, he thought, and get the worst over and the taste out of your mouth as soon as possible.

Until that eventful time, the Prince was free to go where he pleased, and to do whatever he wished. He had insisted upon this liberty, and the Regent, finding him in all other respects so amenable to his leading, gladly made the concession. This left him a year—that is, nearly a year, for it was June now—of care-free bachelorhood; a year for one, who was yet only a dreamy boy, to acquire the proper spirit for a happy bridegroom; a year of Father Paul!

He rode along aimlessly for a short distance, scarcely guiding his horse, and only responding to the greetings of acquaintances he chanced to

meet with absent-minded, though still irreproachable, courtesy. He was hardly thinking at all, now—at least consciously. He was simply glad to be alive, as Youth is glad—in spite of any possible, or impossible, environment.

Suddenly his eyes fell upon a feminine rider some paces in advance, who seemed to attract much attention, of which she was—apparently—delightfully unconscious. Paul marked the faultless proportions of her horse.

"What a magnificent animal!" he thought. Then, under his breath, he added, "and what a stunning rider!"

She was only a girl—about eighteen or nineteen, he should judge by her figure and the girlish poise of her small head—but she certainly knew how to ride. She sat her horse as though a part of him, and controlled his every motion as she would her own.

"Just that way might she manage a man," Paul thought, and then laughed aloud at the absurdity of the thought. For he had never seen the girl before.

Paul admired a good horsewoman—they are

so pitifully few. And he followed her, at a safe distance, with an interest unaccountable, even to him. Finally she drew rein before one of the houses facing the Row, dismounted, and throwing the train of her habit gracefully over her arm, walked to the door with a brisk step. Paul instantly likened her to a bird, so lightly tripping over the walk that her feet scarcely seemed to touch the ground. She was a wee thing—certainly not more than five foot tall—and *petite,* almost to an extreme. The Boy had expressed a preference, only a few days before, for tall, magnificent women. Now he suddenly discovered that the woman for a man to love should by all means be short and small. He wondered why it had never occurred to him in that light before, and thought of Jacques' question about Rosalind, "What stature is she of?" and Orlando's reply, "As high as my heart!"

The girl who had aroused this train of thought had reached the big stone steps by this time, and suddenly turning to look over her shoulder, just as he passed the gate, met his gaze

squarely. Gad! what eyes those were!—full of mystery and magnetism, and—possibilities!

For an instant their eyes clung together in that strange mingling of glances that sometimes holds even utter strangers spellbound by its compelling force.

Then she turned and entered the house, and Paul rode on.

But that glance went with him. It tormented him, troubled him, perplexed him. He felt a mad desire to turn back, to follow her into that house, and compel her to meet his eyes again. Did she know the power of her own eyes? Did she know a look like that had almost the force of a caress?

He told himself that they were the most beautiful eyes that he had ever seen—and yet he could not have told the color of them to save his soul. He began to wonder about that. It vexed him that he could not remember.

"Eyes!" he thought, "those are not eyes! They are living magnets, drawing a fellow on and on, and he never stops to think what color they are—nor *care!*"

And then he pulled himself up sharply, and declared himself a madman for raving on the street in broad daylight over the mere accidental meeting with a pair of pretty eyes. He—the uncrowned king of a to-be-glorious throne! He—the affianced husband of the Princess Elodie of—Hell! He refused to think of it! And again the horse he rode and the Park trees heard a bit of Paul Zalenska's English profanity that should have made them hide in shame over the depravity of youth.

But the strangest thing of all was that the Boy, for the nonce, was not thinking of—nor listening for—the voice!

He turned as he reached the end of the Row and rode slowly back. But the horses and groom had already gone from the gate. And inwardly cursing his slowness, he started on a trot for Berkeley Square.

He was not very far from the Verdayne house, when, turning a sudden corner, he came upon the girl again, riding at a leisurely pace in the opposite direction. Startled by his unexpected appearance, she glanced back over her shoulder

as she passed, surprising him—and perhaps herself, too, for girls do that sometimes—by a ringing and tantalizing laugh!

That laugh! Wonder upon wonders, it was *the voice!*

It was she—Opal!

He wheeled his horse sharply, but swift as he was, she was yet swifter and was far down the street before he was fairly started in pursuit. His one desire of the moment was to catch and conquer the sprite that tempted him.

Her veil fluttered out behind her on the breeze, like a signal of no-surrender, and once—only once—she looked back over her shoulder. She was too far ahead for him to catch the glint of her eye, but he heard the echo of that laugh —that voice—and it spurred him on and on.

Suddenly, by some turn known only to herself, she eluded him and escaped beyond his vision—and beyond his reach. He halted his panting horse at the crossing of several streets, and swore again. But though he looked searchingly in every possible direction, there was no trace of the fugitive to be seen. It was as

though the earth had opened and swallowed horse and rider in one greedy gulp.

Baffled and more disappointed than he cared to own, Paul rode slowly back to Berkeley Square, his heart bounding with the excitement of the chase and yet thoroughly vexed over his failure, at himself, his horse, the girl.

At the house he found letters from the Regent awaiting him, recalling to him his position and its unwelcome responsibilities. One of them enclosed a full-length photograph of his future bride.

Fate had certainly been kind to him by granting his one expressed wish. The Princess Elodie was what he had desired, "quite six-foot tall." Yet he pushed the portrait aside with an impatient gesture, and before his mental vision rose a little figure tripping up the steps, with a backward glance that still seemed to pierce his very soul.

He was not thinking, as he certainly should have been, of the Princess Elodie! And he had not even noticed whether she had any eyes or not!

He looked again at the picture of the Austrian princess, lying face upward upon the pile of letters. With disgust and loathing he swept the offending portrait into a drawer, and summoning Vasili, began to make a hasty toilet.

Vasili had never seen his young master in such bad humor. He was unpardonably late for luncheon, but that would not disturb him, surely not to such an extent as this!

He was greatly disturbed by something. There was no denying that.

He had found the voice, but——

CHAPTER VI

It was the next morning at the breakfast table that Paul Zalenska, listlessly looking over the "Society Notes" in the *Times,* came upon this significant notice:

> "Mr. Gilbert Ledoux and daughter, Miss Opal Ledoux, of New Orleans, accompanied by Henri, Count de Roannes, of Paris, have taken passage on the Lusitania, which sails for New York on July 3rd."

It was *she,* of course!—who else could it be? Surely there could not be more than one Opal in America!

"Father Paul, I notice that the Lusitania is to sail for America on the third of July. Can't we make it?"

Verdayne smiled quietly at the suddenness of

the proposal, but was not unduly surprised. He remembered many unaccountable impulses of his own when his life was young and his blood was hot. He remembered too with a tender gratitude how his father had humored him and—was he not "Father Paul"?

"I see no reason why not, Boy."

"You see, I have already lost a whole month out of my one free year. I am unwilling to waste a single hour of it, Father Paul—wouldn't you be? And we *must* see America together, you and I, before I go back to—prison!"

"Certainly, Boy, certainly. My time is yours—when you want it, and where you want it, the whole year through!"

"I know that, Father Paul, and—I thank you!"

It was more difficult to arrange matters with Lady Henrietta. She was not so young as she once was and she still adored her son, as only the mother of but one child can adore, and could not bear the idea of having him away from her. Old and steady as he had now become, he was still her boy, the idol of her heart. Yet she felt, as her son did, that the Boy was entitled to the few months

of liberty left him, and she did not greatly object, though there was a wistful look in her eyes as they rested on her son that told how keenly she felt every separation from him.

As for Sir Charles, he had not lost the knowing twinkle of the eye. Moreover, he knew far better than his wife how real was the claim their young guest had upon their son. And he bade them go with a hearty grasp of the hand and a bluff Godspeed.

So it was settled that Verdayne and the Boy, attended only by Vasili, were to sail for America on the third of July, and passage was immediately secured on the Lusitania.

On the morning of the day appointed, Paul Zalenska from an upper deck watched the party he had been awaiting, as they mounted the gangplank.

Gilbert Ledoux he scarcely noticed. The Count de Roannes, too, interested him no longer when, with a hasty glance, he had assured him-

self that the Frenchman was as old as Ledoux and not the gay young dandy in Opal's train that he had feared to find him.

He had eyes alone for the girl, and he watched her closely as she tripped up the gang-plank, clinging to her father's arm and chattering gayly in that voice he so well remembered.

She was not so small at close range as she had appeared at a distance, but possessed an exquisite roundness of figure and softness of outline well in proportion to the shortness of her stature.

He had been proud of his kingship—very proud of his royal blood and his mission to his little kingdom. But of late he had known some rebellious thoughts, quite foreign to his mental habit.

And to-day, as he looked at Opal Ledoux, he thought, "After all, how much of a real man can I ever be? What am I but a petty pawn on the chessboard of the world, moved hither and yon, to gain or to lose, by the finger of Fate!"

As Opal Ledoux passed him, she met his glance, and slightly flushed by the *rencontre*, looked back over her shoulder at him and—smiled! And *such*

a smile! She passed on, leaving him tingling in every fibre with the thrill of it.

It was Fate. He had felt it from the very first, and now he was sure of it.

How would it end? How *could* it end?

Paul Zalenska was very young—oh, very young, indeed!

CHAPTER VII

THE next day Verdayne and his young companion were introduced to Mr. Ledoux and his guest.

Gilbert Ledoux, a reserved man evidently descended from generations of thinking people, was apparently worried, for his face bore unmistakable signs of some mental disturbance. Paul Zalenska was struck by the haunted expression of what must naturally have been a grave countenance. It was not guilt, for he had not the face of a man pursued by conscience, but it certainly was fear—a real fear. And Paul wondered.

As for the Count de Roannes, the Boy dismissed him at once as unworthy of further consideration. He was brilliantly, even artificially polished — glaringly ultra-fashionable, ostentatiously polite and suave. In the lines of his bestial face he bore the records of a lifetime's profligacy and the black tales of habitual self-indulgence.

Paul hated him instinctively and wondered how a man of Ledoux's unmistakable refinement could tolerate him for a moment.

It was not until the middle of the following afternoon that Opal Ledoux appeared on deck, when her father, with an air of pride, mingled with a certain curious element of timidity, presented to her in due form both the Englishman and his friend.

The eyes of the two young people flashed a recognition that the lips of each tacitly denied as they responded conventionally to the introduction.

Paul noticed that the shadow of her father's uneasiness was reflected upon her in a somewhat lesser but all too evident degree. And again he wondered.

A few moments of desultory conversation that was of no interest to Paul—and then the Count proposed a game of *écarté,* to which Verdayne and Ledoux assented readily enough.

But not so our Boy!

Ecarté! Bah! When did a boy of twenty ever want to play cards within sound of the rustle of a petticoat?—and *such* a petticoat!

When the elderly gallant noted the attitude of the young fellow he cast a quick glance of suspicion at Opal. He would have withdrawn his proposal had he been able to find any plausible excuse. But it was too late. And with an inward invective on his own blundering, he followed the other gentlemen to the smoking-room.

And Paul and Opal were at last face to face—and alone!

He turned as the sound of the retreating steps died away and looked long and searchingly into her face. If the girl intended to ignore their former meeting, he thought, he would at once put that idea beyond all question. She bore his scrutiny with no apparent embarrassment. She was an American girl, and as she would have expressed it, she was "game!"

"Well?" she said at last, questioningly.

"Yes," he responded, "well—well, indeed, *at last!*"

She bowed mockingly.

"And," he went on, "I have been searching for you a long time, Opal!"

He had not intended to say that, but having said it, he would not take it back.

Then she remembered that she had said that she would call him "Paul" the first time she met him, and she smiled.

"Searching for me? I don't understand."

"Of course not! Neither do I! Why should we? The best things in life are the things we don't—and can't—understand. Is it not so?"

"Perhaps!" doubtfully. She had never thought of it in just that light before, but it might be true. It was human nature to be attracted by mystery. "But you have been looking for me, you say! Since when?—our race?" And her laugh rang out on the air with its old mocking rhythm.

And the Boy felt his blood tingle again at the memory of it.

"But what did you say, Monsieur Zalenska—pardon me—Paul, I mean," and she laughed again, "what did you say as you rode home again?"

The Boy shook his head with affected contrition.

"Unfit to tell a lady!" he said.

And the girl laughed again, pleased by his frankness.

"Vowed eternal vengeance upon my luckless head, I suppose!"

"Oh, not so bad as that, I think," said Paul, pretending to reflect upon the matter—"I am sure it was not quite so bad as that!"

"It would hardly have done, would it, to vow what you were not at all sure you would ever be able to fulfil? Take my advice, and never bank a *sou* upon the move of any woman!"

"You're not a woman," he laughed in her eyes; "you're just an abbreviation!"

But Opal was not one whit sensitive upon the subject of her height. Not she!

"Well, some abbreviations are more effective than the words they stand for," she retorted. "I shall cling to the flattering hope that such may be my attraction to the reader whose 'only books are woman's looks!' "

"But why did you run away?"

"Just—because!" Then, after a pause, "Why did you follow?"

"I don't know, do you? Just—because, I suppose!"

And then they both laughed again.

"But I know why you ran. You were afraid!" said Paul.

Her eyes flashed and there was a fine scorn in her tones.

"Afraid—of what, pray?"

"Of being caught—too easily! Come, now—weren't you?"

"I wouldn't contradict you for the world, Paul."

She lingered over his name with a cadence in her tone that made it almost a caress. It thrilled him again as it had from the beginning.

"But I'll forgive you for running away from me, since I am so fortunate as to be with you now where you can't possibly run very far! Strange, isn't it, how Fate has thrown us together?"

"Very!"

There was a dry sarcasm in the tones, and a mockery in the glance, that told him she was not blind to his manœuvres. Their eyes met and they laughed again. Truly, life just then was exceed-

ingly pleasant for the two on the deck of the Lusitania.

"But I was looking for you before that, Opal—long before that—weeks!"

The girl was truly surprised now and turned to him wonderingly. Then, without question, he told her of his overhearing her at the garden party—what a long time ago it seemed!—and his desire, ever since, to meet her.

He told her, too, of his hearing her laugh at the theatre that night; but the girl was silent, and said not a word of having seen him there. Confidences were all right for a man, she thought, but a girl did well to keep some things to herself.

He did not say that he was deliberately following her to America, but the girl had her own ideas upon the subject and smiled to herself at the lively development of affairs since that tiresome garden party she had found so unbearable. Here was an adventure after her own heart.

And yet Opal Ledoux had much on her mind just then. The Boy had read the signs upon her face correctly. She was troubled.

For a long time they sat together, and looking

far out over the vast expanse of dancing blueness, they spoke of life—and the living of it. And both knew so little of either!

It was a strange talk for the first one—so subtly intimate, with its flashes of personality and freedom from conventions, that it seemed like a meeting of old friends, rather than of strangers. Some intimacies are like the oak, long and steady of growth; others spring to full maturity in an hour's time. And these two had bridged the space of years in a few moments of converse. They understood each other so well.

This same idea occurred to them simultaneously, as she looked up at him with eyes glowing with a quick appreciation of some well-expressed and worthy thought. Something within him stirred to sudden life—something that no one else had ever reached.

He looked into her eyes and thought he had never looked into the eyes of a woman before. She smiled—and he was sure it was the first time he had ever seen a woman smile!

"I am wild to be at home again," she was saying, "fairly crazy for America! How I love her

big, broad, majestic acres—the splendid sweep of her meadows—the massive grandeur of her mountain peaks—the glory of her open skies! You too, I believe, are a wanderer on strange seas. You can hardly fail to understand my longing for the homeland!"

"I do understand, Opal. I am on my first visit to your country. Tell me of her—her institutions, her people! Believe me, I am greatly interested!"

And he was—in *her!* Nothing else counted at that moment. But the girl did not understand that—then!

For half an hour, perhaps, she lost herself in an eloquent eulogy of America, while the Boy sat and watched her, catching the import of but little that she said, it must be confessed, but drinking in every detail of her expressive countenance, her flashing, lustrous eyes, her red, impulsive lips and rounded form, and her white, slender hands, always employed in the expression of a thought or as the outlet for some passing emotion. He caught himself watching for the occasional glimpses of her small white teeth between the rose of her lips. He saw in her eyes the violet sparks of smoulder-

ing fires, kindled by the volcanic heart sometimes throbbing and threatening so close to the surface. When the eruption came!— Fascinated he watched the rise and sweep of her white arm. Every line and curve of her body was full of suggestion of the ardent and restless and impulsive temperament with which nature had so lavishly endowed her. She was alive with feeling—alive to the finger-tips with the joy of life, the fullness of a deep, emotional nature.

It occurred to Paul that nature had purposely left her body so small, albeit so beautifully rounded, that it might devote all its powers to the building therein of a magnificent, flaming soul—that her inner nature might always triumph. But Opal had never been especially conscious of a soul —scarcely of a body. She had not yet found herself.

Paul's emotions were in such chaotic rebellion that the thunder of his heart-beats mingled with the pulse hammering through his brain and made him for the first time in his life curiously deaf to his own thoughts.

As she met his eye, expressing more than he

realized of the storm within, her own fell with a sudden sense of apprehension. She rose and looked far out over the restless waves with a sudden flush on her dimpled cheek, a subtle excitement in her rapid words.

"As for our men, Paul, they are only human beings, but mighty with that strength of physique and perfect development of mind that makes for power. They are men of dauntless purpose. They are men of pure thoughts and lofty ideals. They know what they want and bend every ambition and energy to its attainment. Of course I speak of the average American—the *type!* The normal American is a born fighter. Yes, that is the key-note of American supremacy! We never give up! never! In my country, what men want, they get!"

She raised her hand in a quaint, expressive gesture, and the loose sleeve fell back, leaving her white arm bare. He sprang to his feet, his eyes glowing.

"And in my country, what men want, they *take!*" he responded fiercely—almost brutally and without a second's warning Paul threw his arms

about her and crushed her against his breast. He pressed his lips mercilessly upon her own, holding them in a kiss that seemed to Opal would never end.

"How—how dare you!" she gasped, when at last she escaped his grasp and faced him in the fury of outraged girlhood. "I—I—hate you!"

"Dare? When one loves one dares anything!" was his husky response. "I shall have had my kiss and you can never forget that! Never! never!"

And Paul's voice grew exultant.

Opal had heard of the brutality, the barbarism of passion, but her life had flowed along conventional channels as peacefully as a quiet river. She had longed to believe in the fury of love—in that irresistible attraction between men and women. It appealed to her as it naturally appeals to all women who are alive with the intensity of life. But she had *seen* nothing of it.

Now she looked living Passion in the face for the first time, and was appalled—half frightened, half fascinated—by the revelation. That kiss seemed to scorch her lips with a fire she had never

dreamed of. With the universal instinct of shamed womanhood, she pressed her handkerchief to her lips, rubbing fiercely at the soiled spot. He divined her thought and laughed, with a note of exultation that stirred her Southern blood.

In defiance she raised her eyes and searched his face, seeking some solution of the mystery of her own heart's strange, rebellious throbbing. What could it mean?

Paul took another step toward her, his face softening to tenderness.

"What is it, Opal?" he breathed.

"I was—trying—to understand you."

"I don't understand myself sometimes—certainly not to-day!"

"I thought you were a gentleman!"

(I wonder if Eve didn't say that to Adam in the garden!)

"I have been accustomed to entertain that same idea myself," he said, "but, after all, what is it to be a gentleman? All men can be gentle when they get what they want. That's no test of gentility. It takes circumstances outsid the normal to prove man's civilization. When his desires meet with

opposition the brute comes to the surface—that's all."

Another rush of passion lighted his eyes and sought its reflection in hers. Opal turned and fled.

In the seclusion of her stateroom Opal faced herself resolutely. A sensation of outrage mingled with a strange sense of guilt. Her resentment seemed to blend with something resembling a strange, fierce joy. She tried to fight it down, but it would not be conquered.

Why was he so handsome, so brilliant, this strange foreign fellow whom she felt intuitively to be more than he claimed to be? What was the secret of his power that even in the face of this open insult she could not be as angry as she knew she should have been?

She looked in the mirror apprehensively. No, there was no sign of that terrible kiss. And yet she felt as though all the world must have seen had they looked at her—felt that she was branded forever by the burning touch of his lips!

CHAPTER VIII

It was not until the dinner hour on the following day that Paul and Opal met again. One does not require an excuse for keeping to one's stateroom during an ocean voyage—especially during the first few days—and the girl, though in excellent health and a capital sailor, kept herself secluded.

She wanted to understand herself and to understand this stranger who was yet no stranger. For a girl who had looked upon life as she had she felt woefully unsophisticated. But the Boy? He was certainly not a man of the world, who through years of lurid experience had learned to look upon all women as his legitimate quarry. If he had been that sort, she told herself, she would have been on her guard instinctively from the very first. But she knew he was too young for that—far too young—and his eyes were frank and clear and open, with no dark secrets behind their curtained lids. But what was he—and who?

When the day was far spent, she knew that she was no nearer a solution than she had been at dawn, so she resolved to join the group at table and put behind her the futile labor of self-examination. She would not, of course, deign to show any leniency toward the offender—indeed not! She would not vouchsafe one unnecessary word for his edification.

But she took elaborate care with her toilet, selected her most becoming gown and drove her maid into a frenzy by her variations of taste and temper.

It was truly a very bewitching Opal who finally descended to the *salon* and joined the party of four masculine incapables who had spent the day in vain search for amusement. Paul Zalenska rose hastily at her entrance and though she made many attempts to avoid his gaze she was forced at last to meet it. The electric spark of understanding flashed from eye to eye, and both thrilled in answer to its magnetic call. In the glance that passed between them was lurking the memory of a kiss.

Opal blushed faintly. How dare he remember! Why, his very eyes echoed that triumphant laugh she could not forget. She stole another glance at him. Perhaps she had misjudged him—but—

She turned to respond to the greeting of her father and the other two gentlemen, and soon found herself seated at the table opposite the Boy she had so recently vowed to shun. Well, she needn't talk to him, that was one consolation. Yet she caught herself almost involuntarily listening for what he would say at this or that turn of the conversation and paying strict—though veiled—attention to his words.

It was a strange dinner. No one felt at ease. The air was charged with something that all felt too tangibly oppressive, yet none could define, save the two—who would not.

For Paul the evening was a dismal failure. Try as he would, he could not catch Opal's eye again, nor secure more than the most meagre replies even to his direct questions. She was too French

to be actually impolite, but she interposed between them those barriers only a woman can raise. She knew that Paul was mad for a word with her; she knew that she was tormenting and tantalizing him almost beyond endurance; she felt his impatience in every nerve of her, with that mysterious sixth sense some women are endowed with, and she rejoiced in her power to make him suffer. He deserved to suffer, she said. Perhaps he'd have some idea of the proper respect due the next girl he met! These foreigners! *Mon Dieu!* She'd teach him that American girls were a little different from the kind they had in his country, where "what men want, they take," as he had said. What kind of heathen was he?

And she watched him surreptitiously from under her long lashes with a curious gleam of satisfaction in her eyes. She had always known she had this power over men, but she had never cared quite so much about using it before and had been more annoyed than gratified by the effect her personality had had upon her masculine world.

So she smiled at the Count, she laughed with the Count and made eyes most shamelessly at the

disgusting old gallant till something in his face warned her that she had reached a point beyond which even her audacity dared not go.

Heavens! how the old monster would *devour* a woman, she thought, with a thrill of disgust. There were awful things in his face!

And the Boy glared at de Roannes with unspeakable profanity in his eyes, while the girl laughed to herself and enjoyed it all as girls do enjoy that sort of thing.

It was delightful, this game of speaking eyes and lips.

"Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
And the little less, and what worlds away!"

But it was, as she could dimly see, a game that might prove exceedingly dangerous to play, and the Count had spoiled it all, anyway. And a curious flutter in her heart, as she watched the Boy take his punishment with as good grace as possible, pled for his pardon until she finally desisted and bade the little company good night.

At her departure the men took a turn at bridge,

but none of them seemed to care much for the cards that night and the Boy soon broke away. He was about to withdraw to his stateroom in chagrin when quite unexpectedly he found Opal standing by the rail, wrapped in a long cloak. She was gazing far out toward the distant horizon, the light of strange, puzzling thoughts in the depths of her eyes. She did not notice him until he stood by her side, when she turned and faced him defiantly.

"Opal," he said, "there was one poet of life and love whom we did not quote in our little discussion to-night. Do you remember Tennyson's words,

> " 'A man had given all earthly bliss
> And all his worldly worth for this,
> To waste his whole heart in one kiss
> Upon her perfect lips?'

Let them plead for me the pardon I know no better way to sue for—or explain!"

The girl was silent. That little flutter in her heart was pleading for him, but her head was still rebellious, and she knew not which would

triumph. She put one white finger on her lip, and wondered what to say to him. She would not look into his eyes—they bothered her quite beyond all reason—so she looked at the deck instead, as though hoping to find some rule of conduct there.

"I am sorry, Opal," went on the pleading tones, "that is, sorry that it offended you. I can't be sorry that I did it—yet!"

After a moment of serious reflection, she looked up at him sternly.

"It was a very rude thing to do, Paul! No one ever——"

"Don't you suppose I know that, Opal? Did you think that I thought——"

"How was I to know what you thought, Paul? You didn't know me!"

"Oh, but I do. Better than you know yourself!"

She looked up at him quickly, a startled expression in her soft, lustrous eyes.

"I—almost—believe you do—Paul."

"Opal!" He paused. She was tempting him again. Didn't she know it?

"Opal, can't—won't you believe in me? Don't you feel that you know me?"

"I'm not sure that I do—even yet—after—that! Oh, Paul, are you sure that you know yourself?"

"No, not sure, but I'm beginning to!"

She made no reply. After a moment, he said softly, "You haven't said that you forgive me, yet, Opal! I know there is no plausible excuse for me, but—listen! I couldn't help it—I truly couldn't! You simply must forgive me!"

"Couldn't help it?"—Oh, the scorn of her reply. "If there had been any man in you at all, you could have helped it!"

"No, Opal, you don't understand! It is because I *am* a man that I couldn't help it. It doesn't strike you that way now, I know, but—some day you will see it!"

And suddenly she did see it. And she reached out her hand to him, and whispered, "Then let's forget all about it. I am willing to—if you will!"

Forget? He would not promise that. He did not wish to forget! And she looked so pretty and provoking as she said it, that he wanted to—!

But he only took her hand, and looked his gratitude into her eyes.

The Count de Roannes came unexpectedly and unobserved upon the climax of the little scene, and read into it more significance than it really had. It was not strange, perhaps, that to him this meeting should savour of clandestine relations and that he should impute to it false motives and impulses. The Count prided himself upon his tact, and was therefore very careful to use the most idiomatic English in his conversation. But at this sudden discovery—for he had not imagined that the acquaintance had gone beyond his own discernment—he felt the English language quite inadequate to the occasion, and muttered something under his breath that sounded remarkably like *"Tison d'enfer!"* as he turned on his heel and made for his stateroom.

And the Boy, unconscious and indifferent to all this by-play, had only time to press to his lips the little hand she had surrendered to him before the crowd was upon them.

But the waves were singing a Te Deum in his ears, and the skies were bluer in the moonlight

than ever sea-skies were before. Paul felt, with a thrill of joy, that he was looking far off into the vaster spaces of life, with their broader, grander possibilities. He felt that he was wiser, nobler, stronger—nearer his ideal of what a brave man should be.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN two are young, and at sea, and in love, and the world is beautiful and bright, it is joyous and wonderful to drift thoughtlessly with the tide, and rise and fall with the waves. Thus Paul Zalenska and Opal Ledoux spent that most delightful of voyages on the Lusitania. They were not often alone. They did not need to be. Their intimacy had at one bound reached that point when every word and movement teemed with tender significance and suggestion. Their first note had reached such a high measure that all the succeeding days followed at concert pitch. It was a voyage of discovery. Each day brought forth revelations of some new trait of character —each unfolding that particular something which the other had always admired.

And so their intimacy grew.

Paul Verdayne saw and smiled. He was glad to see the Boy enjoying himself. He knew his chances for that sort of thing were all too pathetically few.

Mr. Ledoux looked on, troubled and perplexed, but he saw no chance, and indeed no real reason, for interfering.

The Count de Roannes was irritated, at times even provoked, but he kept his thoughts to himself, hiding his annoyance, and his secret explosions of *"Au diable!"* beneath his usual urbanity.

There was nothing on the surface to indicate more than the customary familiarity of young people thrown together for a time, and yet no one could fail to realize the undercurrent of emotion below the gaiety of the daily ripple of amusement and pleasurable excitement and converse.

They read together, they exchanged experiences of travel, they discussed literature, music, art and the stage, with the enthusiastic partisanship of zealous youth. They talked of life, with its shade and shadow, its heights and depths of meaning, and altogether became very

well acquainted. Each day anew, they discovered an unusual congeniality in thoughts and opinions. They shared in a large measure the same exalted outlook upon life—the same lofty ambitions and dreams.

And the more Paul learned of the character of this strange girl, the more he felt that she was the one woman in the world for him. To be sure, he had known that, subconsciously, the first time he had heard her voice. Now he knew it by force of reason as well, and he cursed the fate that denied him the right to declare himself her lover and claim her before the world.

One thing that impressed Paul about the girl was the generous charity with which she viewed the frailties of human nature, her sincere pity for all forms of human weakness and defeat, her utter freedom from petty malice or spite. Rail at life and its hypocrisies, as she often did, she yet felt the tragedy in its pitiful short-comings, and looked with the eye of real compassion upon its sins and its sinners, condoning as far as possible the fault she must have in her very heart abhorred.

"We all make mistakes," she would say, when someone retailed a bit of scandal. "No human being is perfect, nor within a thousand miles of perfection. What right then have we to condemn any fellow-creature for his sins, when we break just as important laws in some other direction? It's common hypocrisy to say, 'We never could have done this terrible thing!' and draw our mantle of self-righteousness closely about us lest it become contaminated. Perhaps we couldn't! Why? Because our temptations do not happen to lie in that particular direction, that's all! But we are all law-breakers; not one keeps the Ten Commandments to the letter—not one! Attack us on our own weak point and see how quickly we run up the flag of surrender—and perhaps the poor sinner we denounce for his guilt would scorn just as bitterly to give in to the weakness that gets the best of us. *Sin is sin,* and one defect is as hideous as another. He who breaks one part of the code of morality and righteousness is as guilty—just exactly as guilty—as he who breaks another. Isn't the first commandment as binding as the other nine?

And now many of us do not break that every day we live?"

And there was the whole creed of Opal Ledoux.

But as intimate as she and the Boy had become, they yet knew comparatively little of each other's lives.

Opal guessed that the Boy was of rank, and bound to some definite course of action for political reasons. This much she had gained from odds and ends of conversation. But beyond that, she had no idea who he was, nor whence he came. She would not have been a woman had she not been curious—and as I have said before, Opal Ledoux was, every inch of her five feet, a woman—but she never allowed herself to wax inquisitive.

As for the Boy, he knew there was some evil hovering with threatening wings over the sunshine of the girl's young life—some shadow she tried to forget, but could not put aside—and he grew to associate this shadow with the continued presence of the French Count, and his intimate air of authority. Paul knew not why

he should thus connect these two, but nevertheless the impression grew that in some way de Roannes exercised a sinister influence over the life of the girl he loved.

He hated the Count. He resented every look that those dissolute eyes flashed at the girl, and he noticed many. He saw Opal wince sometimes, and then turn pale. Yet she did not resent the offense.

But Paul did.

"Such a look from a man like that is the grossest insult to any woman," he thought, writhing in secret rage. "How can she permit it? If she were my—my *sister*, I'd shoot him if he once dared to turn his damned eyes in her direction!"

And thus matters stood throughout the brief voyage. Paul and Opal, though conscious of the double barrier between them, tried to forget its existence for the moment, and, at intervals, succeeded admirably.

For were they not in the spring-time of youth, and in love?

And Paul Zalenska talked to this girl as he

had never talked to anyone before—not even Paul Verdayne!

She brought out the latent best in him. She developed in him a quickness of perception, a depth of thought and emotion, a facility of speech which he had never known. She stimulated every faculty, and gave him new incentive —a new and firmer resolve to aspire and fight for all that he held dear.

"I always feel," he said to Opal, once, "as though my soul stood always at attention, awaiting the inevitable command of Fate! All Nature seems to tell me at times that there is a purpose in my living, a work for me to do, and I feel so thoroughly *alive*—so ready to listen to the call of duty—and to obey!"

"A dreamer!" she laughed, "as wild a dreamer as I!"

"Why not?" he returned. "All great deeds are born of dreams! It was a dreamer who found this America you are so loyal to! And who knows but that I too may find my world?"

"And a fatalist, too!"

"Why, of course! Everyone is, to a greater or a less extent, though most dare not admit it!"

"But yesterday you said—what *did* you say, Paul, about the power of the human will over environment and fate?"

"I don't remember. That was yesterday. I'm not the same to-day, at all. And to-morrow I may be quite different."

"Behold the consistency of man. But Fate, Paul—what makes Fate? I have always been taught to believe that the world is what we make it!"

"And it is true, too, that in a way we may make the world what we will, each creating it anew for himself, after his own pattern—but after all, Opal, that is Fate. For what we *are*, we put into these worlds of ours, and what we are is what our ancestors have made us—and that is what I understand by destiny."

"Ah, Paul, you have so many noble theories of life."

His boyish face grew troubled and perplexed.

"I *thought* I had, Opal—till I knew you! Now I do not know! Fate seems to have taken

a hand in the game and my theories are cast aside like worthless cards. I begin to see more clearly that we cannot always choose our paths."

"Can one ever, Paul?"

"Perhaps not! Once I believed implicitly in the omnipotence of the human will to make life just what one wished. Now"—and he searched her eyes—"I know better."

"Unlucky Opal, to cross your path!" she sighed. "Are you superstitious, Paul? Do you know that opals bring bad luck to those who come beneath the spell of their influence?"

"I'll risk the bad luck, Opal!"

And she smiled.

And he thought as he looked at her, how well she understood him! What an inspiration would her love have brought to such a life as he meant his to be! What a Récamier or du Barry she would have made, with her *piquante,* captivating face, her dark, lustrous, compelling eyes, her significant gestures, which despite many wayward words and phrases, expressed only lofty and majestic thoughts! Her whole regal little

body, with its irresistible power and charm, was so far beyond most women! She was life and truth and ambition incarnate! She was the spirit of dreams and the breath of idealism and the very soul of love and longing.

Would she feel insulted, he wondered, had she known he had dared to compare her, even in his own thoughts, with a king's mistress? He meant no insult—far from it! But would she have understood it had she known?

Paul fancied that she would.

"They may not have been moral, those women," he thought, "that is, what the world calls 'moral' in the present day, but they possessed power, marvellous power, over men and kingdoms. Opal Ledoux was created to exert power—her very breath is full of force and vitality!"

"Yes," he repeated aloud after due deliberation, "I'll risk the bad luck if you'll be good to me!"

"Am I not?"

"Not always."

"Well, I will be to-day. See! I have a new

book—a sad little love-tale, they say—just the thing for two to read at sea," and with a heightened color she began to read.

She had pulled her deck-chair forward, until she sat in a flood of sunshine, and the bright rays, falling on her mass of rich brown hair, heightened all the little glints of red-gold till they looked like living bits of flame. Oh the vitality of that hair! the intense glow of those eyes in whose depths the flame-like glitter was reflected as the voice, too, caught fire from the fervid lines!

Soon the passion and charm of the poem cast its spell over them both as they followed the fate of the unhappy lovers through the heart-ache of their evanescent dream.

Their eyes met with a quick thrill of understanding.

"It is—Fate, again," Paul whispered. "Read on, Opal!"

She read and again they looked, and again they understood.

"I cannot read any more of it," she faltered, a real fear in her voice. "Let us put it away."

"No, no!" he pleaded. "It's true—too true. Read on, please, dear!"

"I cannot, Paul. It is too sad!"

"Then let me read it, Opal, and you can listen!"

And he took the book gently from her hand, and read until the sun was smiling its farewell to the laughing waters.

That evening a strong wind was playing havoc with the waves, and the fury of the maddened spray was beating a fierce accompaniment to their hearts.

"How I love the wind," said Opal. "More than all else in Nature I love it, I think, whatever its mood may be. I never knew why—probably because I, too, am capricious and full of changing moods. If it is tender and caressing, I respond to its appeal; if it is boisterous and wild, I grow reckless and dash in sympathy; and when it is fierce and passionate, I feel my blood rush within me. I am certainly a child of the wind!"

"Let us hope you will never experience a cyclone," said the Count, drily. "It might be disastrous!"

"True, it might," said Opal, and she did not smile. "I echo your kind hope, Count de Roannes."

And the Boy looked, and listened, and loved!

CHAPTER X

As they left the dinner-table, Opal passed the Boy on her way to her stateroom, and laying her hand upon his arm, looked up into his face appealingly. He wondered how any man could resist her.

"Let's put the book away, Paul, and never look at it again!"

"Will you be good to me if I do?" he demanded.

She considered a moment. "How?" she asked, finally.

"Come out for just a few moments under the stars, and say good-night."

"The idea! I can say good-night here and now!" She hesitated.

"Please, Opal! I seldom see you alone—really alone—and this is our last night, you know. To-morrow we shall part—perhaps for-

ever—who knows? Can you be so cruel as to refuse this one request. Please come!"

His eyes were wooing, her heart fluttering in response.

"Well—perhaps!" she said.

"Perhaps?" he echoed, with a smile, then added, teasingly, "Are you afraid?"

"Afraid?—I dare anything—to-night!"

"Then come!"

"I will—if I feel like this when the time comes. But," and she gave him a tantalizing glance from under her long lashes, "don't expect me!"

Paul tried to look disappointed, but he felt sure that she would come.

And she did! But not till he had given up all hope, and was pacing the deck in an agony of impatience. He had felt so certain that he knew his beloved! She came, swiftly, silently, almost before he was aware.

"Well, . . . I'm here," she said.

"I see you are, Opal and—thank you."

He extended his hand, but she clasped hers

behind her back and looked at him defiantly. Truly she was in a most perverse mood!

"Aren't we haughty!" he laughed.

"No, I'm not; I am—angry!"

"With me?"

"No!—not you."

"Whom, then?"

"With—myself!" And she stamped her tiny foot imperiously.

Paul was delighted. "Poor child," he said. "What have you done that you are so sorry?"

"I'm not sorry! That's why I'm angry! If I were only a bit sorry, I'd have some self-respect!"

Paul looked at her deliberately, taking in every little detail of her appearance, his eyes full of admiration. Then he added, with an air of finality, "But *I* respect you!"

She softened, and laid her hand on his arm. Paul instantly took possession of it.

"Do you really?" she asked, searching his face, almost wistfully. "A girl who will do . . . what I am doing to-night!"

"But what *are* you doing, Opal?" he asked in

the most innocent surprise. "Merely keeping a wakeful man company beneath the stars!"

"Is that . . . all?"

"All . . . *now!*"

They stood silently for a minute, hand still in hand, looking far out over the moonlit waters, each conscious of the trend of the other's thoughts—the beating of the other's heart. The deck was deserted by all save their two selves—they two alone in the big starlit universe. At last she spoke.

"This is interesting, isn't it?"

"Of course!—holding your hand!"

She snatched it from him. "I forgot you had it," she said.

"Forget again!"

"No, I won't! . . . Is it always interesting? . . . holding a girl's hand?"

"It depends upon the girl, I suppose! I was enjoying it immensely just then."

He took her hand again.

And again that perilously sweet silence fell between them.

At last, "Promise me, Paul!" she said.

"I will—what is it?"

"Promise me to forget anything I may say or do to-night. . . . not to think hard of me, however rashly I may act! I'm not accountable, really! I'm liable to say . . . anything! I feel it in my blood!"

"I understand, Opal! See! the winds are boisterous and unruly enough. You may be as rash and reckless as you will!"

Suddenly the wind blew her against his breast. The perfume of her hair, and all the delicious nearness of her, intoxicated him. He laughed a soft, caressing little lover-laugh, and raising her face to his, kissed her lips easily, naturally, as though he had the right. She struggled, helplessly, as he held her closely to him, and would not let her go.

"You are a——" She bit her lip, and choked back the offensive word.

"A—what? Say it, Opal!"

"A—a—*brute!* There! let me go!"

But he only held her closer and laughed again softly, till she whispered, "I didn't—quite—*mean* that, you know!"

"Of course you didn't!"

She drew away from him and pointed her finger at him accusingly, her eyes full of reproof.

"But—you *said* you wouldn't! You promised!"

"Wouldn't what?"

"Wouldn't do—what you did—again!"

"Did I?" insinuatingly.

"How dare you ask that? You——"

"'Brute' again? Quite like old married folk!"

"Old married folk? They never kiss!"

"Don't they?"

"Not each other! . . . other people's husbands or wives!"

"Is that it?"

"Surely——

'Think you, if Laura had been Petrarch's wife,
He would have written sonnets all his life?'

O no! not he!"

"I'm learning many new things, Opal! Let's play we're married, then—to someone else!"

"But—haven't you any conscience at all?"

"Conscience?—what a question! Of course I have!"

"You certainly aren't using it to-night!"

"I'm too busy! Kiss me!"

"The very idea!"

"Please!"

"Certainly not!"

"Then let me kiss you!"

"No!!!"

"Why not?—Don't you like to be loved?"

And his arms closed around her, and his lips found hers again, and held them.

At last, "Silly Boy!"

"Why?"

"Oh! to make such a terrible fuss about something he doesn't really want, and will be sorry he has after he gets it!"

And Paul asked her wickedly, what foolish boy she was talking about now? *He* knew what he really wanted—always—and was not sorry when he had it. Not he! He was sorry only for the good things he had let slip, never for those he had taken!

"But—do let me go, Paul! I don't belong to you!"

"Yes you do—for a little while!" He held her close.

Belong to him! How she thrilled at the thought! Was this what it meant to be—loved? And *did* she belong to him—if only, as he said, for a little while? She certainly didn't belong to herself! Whatever this madness that had suddenly taken possession of her, it was stronger than herself. She couldn't control it—she didn't even want to! At all events, she was *living* to-night! Her blood was rushing madly through her body. She was deliciously, thoroughly alive!

"Paul!—are you listening?"

"Yes, dear!" the answer strangely muffled.

And then she purred in his ear, all the time caressing his cheek with her small white fingers: "You see, Paul, I knew I had made some sort of impression upon you. I must have done so or you wouldn't have—done that! But any girl can make an impression on shipboard, and an affair at sea is always so—evanescent, that no

one expects it to last more than a week. I don't want to make such a transitory impression upon you, Paul. I wanted you to remember me longer. I wanted—oh, I wanted to give you something to remember that was just a little bit different than other girls had given you—some distinct impression that must linger with you—always—always! I'm not like other women! Do you see, Paul? It was all sheer vanity. I wanted you to remember!"

"And did you think I could forget?"

"Of course! All men forget a kiss as soon as their lips cease tingling!"

Paul laughed. "Wise girl! Who taught you so much? Come, confess!"

"Oh, I've known *you* a whole week, Paul, and you——"

But their lips met again and the sentence was never finished.

At last she put her hands on each side of his face and looked up into his eyes.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Paul?"

"Of course not!"

"Of course you are!"

"You misunderstood me!—I said *'Not'!* But why? Are you ashamed of me?"

"I ought to be, oughtn't I? But—I don't believe you can help it!"

His lips crushed hers again, fiercely. "I can't, Opal—I can't!"

She turned away her head, but he buried his face in her neck, kissing the soft flesh again and again.

"Such a slip of a girl!" Paul murmured in her ear, when he again found his voice. "Such a tiny, little girl! I am almost afraid you will vanish if I don't hold you tight!"

Opal was thoroughly aroused now—no longer merely passive—quite satisfactorily responsive.

"I won't, Paul! I won't! But hold me closer, closer! Crush this terrible ache out of my heart if you can, Paul!"

"There were tears in her voice. He clasped her to him and felt her heart throbbing out its pain against its own, as he whispered, "Opal, am I a brute?"

"N-o-o-o-o!" A pause. At last, "Let me go now, Paul! This is sheer insanity!"

But he made no move to release her until she looked up into his eyes in an agony of appeal, and pleaded, "Please, Paul!"

"Are you sure you want to go?"

"No, I'm not sure of that, but I'm quite sure that I *ought* to go! I must! I must!"

And Paul released her. Where was this madness carrying them? Was he acting the part of the man he meant to be, or of a cad—an unprincipled bounder? He did not know. He only knew he wanted to kiss her—*kiss* her . . .

She turned on him in a sudden flash of indignation. "Why have you such power over me?" she demanded.

"What power over you, Opal!"

"What's the use of dodging the truth, you professor of honesty? You make me do things we both know I'll be sorry for all the rest of my life. *Why* do you do it?"

Her eyes blazed with a real anger that made her *piquante* face more alluring than ever to the eyes of the infatuated Boy who watched her. He was fighting desperately for self-control, but

if she should look at him as she had looked sometimes——!

"I can't understand it!" she exclaimed. "I always knew I was capable of being foolish—wicked, perhaps—for a *grande passion*. I could forgive myself that, I think! But for a mere caprice—a *penchant* like this! Oh, Paul! what can you think of me?"

His voice was hoarse—heavy with emotion.

"Think of you, Opal? I am sure you must know what I think. I've never had an opportunity to tell you—in so many words—but you must have seen what I have certainly taken no pains to conceal. Shall I try to tell you, Opal?"

"No, no! I don't want to hear a word—not a word! Do you understand? I forbid you!"

Paul bowed deferentially. She laughed nervously at the humility in his obeisance.

"Don't be ridiculous!" she commanded. "This is growing too melodramatic, and I hate a scene. But, really, Paul, you mustn't—simply mustn't! There are reasons—conditions—and —you must not tell me, and I must not, *will* not listen!"

"I mustn't make love to you, you mean?"

"I mean . . . just that!"

"Why not?"

"Never mind the 'why.' There are plenty of good and sufficient reasons that I might give if I chose, but—I don't choose! The only reason that you need to know is—that I forbid you!"

She turned away with that regal air of hers that made one forget her child-like stature.

"Are you going, Opal?"

"Yes!—what did I come out here for? I can't remember. Do you know?"

"To wish me good-night, of course! And you haven't done it!"

She looked back over her shoulder, a mocking laugh in those inscrutable eyes. Then she turned and held out both hands to him.

"Good-night, Paul, good-night! . . . You seem able to do as you please with me, in spite of —everything—and I just want to stay in your arms forever—forever . . ."

Paul caught her to him, and their lips melted in a clinging kiss.

At last she drew away from his embrace.

"The glitter of the moonlight and the music of the wind-maddened waves must have gone to my brain!" She laughed merrily, pulled his face down to hers for a last swift kiss, and ran from him before he could detain her.

The next morning they met for a brief moment alone.

Opal shook hands with the Boy in her most perfunctory manner.

Paul, after a moment's silent contemplation of her troubled face, bent over her, saying, "Have I offended you, Opal? Are you angry with me?"

She opened her eyes wide and asked with the utmost innocence "For what?"

Paul was disconcerted. "Last night!" he said faintly.

She colored, painfully.

"No, Paul, listen! I don't blame you a bit!—not a bit! A man would be a downright fool not to take—what he wanted—— But if you

want to be—friends with me, you'll just forget all about—last night—or at any rate, ignore it, and never refer to it again."

He extended his hand, and she placed hers in it for the briefest possible instant.

And then their *tête-à-tête* was interrupted, and they sat down for their last breakfast at sea.

Opal Ledoux was not visible again until the Lusitania docked in New York, when she waved her *companion de voyage* a smiling but none the less reluctant *au revoir!*

But Paul was too far away to see the tears in her eyes, and only remembered the smile.

CHAPTER XI

NEW YORK's majestic greatness and ceaseless, tireless activity speedily engrossed the Boy and opened his eager eyes to a wider horizon than he had yet known. There was a new influence in the whir and hum of this metropolis of the Western world that set the wheels of thought to a more rapid motion, and keyed his soul to its highest tension.

It was not until his first letter from the homeland had come across the waters that he paused to wonder what the new factor in his life meant for his future. He had not allowed his reason to assert itself until the force of circumstances demanded that he look his soul in the face, and learn whither he was drifting. Paul was no coward, but he quailed before the ominous clouds that threatened the happiness of himself and the girl he loved.

For now he knew that he loved Opal Ledoux. It was Fate. He had guessed it at the first sound of her voice; he had felt it at the first glance of her eye; and he had known it beyond the peradventure of a doubt at the first touch of her lips.

Yet this letter from his kingdom was full of suggestions of duties to be done, of responsibilities to be assumed, of good still to be brought out of much that was petty and low, and of helpless, miserable human beings who were so soon to be dependent upon him.

"I will make my people happy," he thought. "Happiness is the birthright of every man—be he peasant or monarch." And then the thought came to him, how could he ever succeed in making them truly happy, when he himself had so sorely missed the way! There was only one thing to do, he knew that—both for Opal's sake and for his own—and that was to go far away, and never see the face again that had bewitched him so.

Perhaps, if he did this, he might forget the experience that was, after all, only an episode in

a man's life and—other men forget! He might learn to be calmly happy and contented with his Princess. It was only natural for a young man to make love to a pretty girl, he thought, and why should he be any exception? He had taken the good the gods provided, as any live man would—now he could go his way, as other men did, and—forget! Why not? And yet the mere thought of it cast such a gloom over his spirits that he knew in his heart his philosophic attempt to deceive himself was futile and vain. He might run away, of course—though it was hardly like him to do that—but he would scarcely be able to forget.

And then Verdayne joined him with an open note in his hand—a formal invitation from Gilbert Ledoux for them to dine with him in his Fifth Avenue house on the following evening. He wished his family to meet the friends who had so pleasantly attracted himself and his daughter on shipboard.

Was it strange how speedily the Boy's resolutions vanished? Run away! Not he!

"Accept the invitation, Father Paul, by all means!"

It was a cordial party in which Paul Verdayne and his young companion found themselves on the following evening—a simple family gathering, graciously presided over by Opal's stepmother.

Gilbert Ledoux's wife was one of those fashion-plate women who strike one as too artificial to be considered as more than half human. You wonder if they have also a false set of emotions to replace those they wore out in their youth—*c'est à dire* if they ever had any! Paul smiled at the thought that Mr. Ledoux need have no anxiety over the virtue of his second wife—whatever merry dance the first might have led him!

Opal was not present when the gentlemen were announced, and the bevy of aunts and uncles and cousins were expressing much impatience for her presence—which Paul Zalenska echoed fervently in his heart. It was truly pleasant—this warm blood-interest of kinship.

He liked the American clannishness, and he sighed to think of the utter lack of family affection in his own life.

The drawing-room, where they were received, was furnished in good taste, the Boy thought. The French touch was very prominent—the blend of color seemed to speak to him of Opal. Yes, he liked the room. The effect grew on one with the charm of the real home atmosphere that a dwelling place should have. But he wasn't so much interested in that, after all! In fact, it was rather unsatisfactory—without Opal! These people were *her* people and, of course, of more than ordinary interest to him on her account, but still—

And at last, when the Boy was beginning to acknowledge himself slightly bored, and to resent the familiar footing on which he could see the Count de Roannes already stood in the family circle, Opal entered, and the gloomy, wearisome atmosphere seemed suddenly flooded with sunlight.

She came in from the street, unconventionally removing her hat and gloves as she entered.

"Where have you been so long, Opal?" asked Mrs. Ledoux, with considerable anxiety.

"At the Colony Club, *ma mère*—I read a paper!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" put in the Count, in an amused tone. "On what subject?"

"On 'The Modern Ethical Viewpoint,' *Comte,*" she answered, nodding her little head sagely. "It was very convincing! In fact, I exploded a bomb in the camp that will give them all something sensational to talk about till —till—the next scandal!"

The Count gave a low chuckle of appreciation, while Mr. Ledoux asked, seriously, "But to what purpose, daughter?"

"Why, papa, don't you know? I had to teach Mrs. Stuyvesant Moore, Mrs. Sanford Wyckoff, and several other old ladies how to be good!"

And in the general laugh that followed, she added, under her breath, "Oh, the irony of life!"

Paul watched her in a fever of boyish jealousy as she passed through the family circle, bestowing her kisses left and right with impartial favor. She made the rounds slowly, conscientiously,

and then, with an air of supreme indifference, moved to the Boy's side.

He leaned over her.

"Where are my kisses?" he asked softly.

She clasped her hands behind her back, child-fashion, and looked up at him, a coquettish daring in her eyes.

"Where did you put them last?" she demanded.

"You ought to know!"

"True—I ought. But, as a matter of fact, I haven't the slightest idea. It depends altogether upon what girl you saw last."

"If you think that of me——"

"What else can I think? Our first meeting did not leave much room for conjecture. And, of course——"

"Opal! You have just time to dress for dinner! And the Count is very anxious to see the new orchid, you know!"

There was a suggestion of reproof in Mrs. Ledoux's voice. The girl's face clouded as she turned away in response to the summons. But she threw the Boy a challenge over her shoulder

—a hint of that mischief that always seemed to lurk in the corner of her eye.

Paul bit his lip. He was not a boy to be played with, as Opal Ledoux would find out. And he sulked in a corner, refusing to be conciliated, until at last she re-entered the room, leaning on the Count's "venerable" arm. She had doubtless been showing him the orchid. Humph! What did that old reprobate know—or care—about orchids?

> "A primrose by the river's brim,
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And nothing more."

As the evening passed, there came to the Boy no further opportunity to speak to Opal alone. She not only avoided him herself, but the entire party seemed to have entered into a conspiracy to keep him from her. It roused all the fight in his Slavic blood, and he determined not to be outwitted by any such high-handed proceeding. He crossed the room and boldly broke into the conversation of the group in which she stood.

"Miss Ledoux," he said, "pardon me, but as we are about to leave, I must remind you of your promise to show me the new orchid. I am very fond of orchids. May I not see it now?"

Opal had made no such promise, but as she looked up at him with an instinctive denial, she met his eyes with an expression in their depths she dared not battle. There was no knowing what this impetuous Boy might say or do, if goaded too far.

"Please pardon my forgetfulness," she said, with a propitiating smile, as she took his arm. "We will go and see it."

And the Boy smiled. He had not found his opportunity—he had made one!

With a malicious smile on his thin, wicked lips the Count de Roannes watched them as they moved across the room toward the conservatory—this pair so finely matched that all must needs admire.

It was rather amusing in *les enfants,* he told Ledoux, this "*Paul et Virginie*" episode. Somewhat *bourgeois,* of course—but harmless, he hoped. This with an expressive sneer. But—

mon Dieu!—and there was a sinister gleam in his evil eyes—it mustn't go too far! The girl was a captivating little witch—the old father winced at the significance in the tone—and she must have her fling! He rather admired her the more for her *diablerie*—but she must be careful!

But he need not have feared to-night. Paul Zalenska's triumph was short-lived. When once inside the conservatory, the girl turned and faced him, indignantly.

"What an utterly shameless thing to do!" she exclaimed.

"Why?" he demanded. "You were not treating me with due respect and 'self-preservation is the first law of nature,' you know. I am so little accustomed to being—snubbed, that I don't take it a bit kindly!"

"I did not snub you," she said, "at least, not intentionally. But of course my friends have prior claims on my time and attention. I can't put them aside for a mere stranger."

"A stranger?" he echoed. "Then you mean——"

"I mean what?"

"To ignore our former—acquaintance—altogether?"

"I do mean just that! One has many desperate flirtations on board ship, but one isn't in any way bound to remember them. It is not always —convenient. You may have foolishly remembered. I have—forgotten!"

"You have not forgotten. I say you have not, Opal."

"We use surnames in society, Monsieur Zalenska?"

"Opal!" appealingly.

"Why such emotion, Monsieur?" mockingly.

The Boy was taken aback for a moment, but he met her eyes bravely.

"Why? Because I love you, Opal, and in your heart you know it!"

"Why?"

"Why do I love you? Because I can't help it! Who knows, really, why anything happens or does not happen in this topsy-turvy world?"

The girl looked at him steadily for a moment, and then spoke indifferently, almost lightly.

"Have you looked at the orchid you wished

so much to see, Monsieur Zalenska? Mamma is very proud of it!"

"Opal!"

But she went on, heedless of his interruption, "Because, if you haven't, you must look at it hastily—you have wasted some time quite foolishly already—and I have promised to join the Count in a few moments, and——"

"Very well. I understand, Opal!" Paul stiffened. "I will relieve you of my presence. But don't think you will always escape so easily because I yield now. You have not meant all you have said to me to-night, and I know it as well as you do. You have tried to play with me——"

"I beg your pardon!"

"You knew the tiger was in my blood—you couldn't help but know it!—and yet you deliberately awakened him!" She gave him a startled glance, her eyes appealing for mercy, but he went on relentlessly. "Yes, after the manner of women since the world began, you lured him on and on! Is it my fault—or yours—if he devour us both?"

Paul Verdayne, strangely restless and ill at ease, was passing beneath the window and thus became an involuntary listener to these mad words from the lips of his young friend.

Straightway there rose to his mental vision a picture—never very far removed—a picture of a luxurious room in a distant Swiss hotel, the foremost figure in which was the slender form of a royally fascinating woman, reclining with reckless abandon upon a magnificent tiger skin, stretched before the fire. He saw her lavishing her caresses upon the inanimate head. He heard her purr once more in the vibrant, appealing tones so like the Boy's.

The stately Englishman passed his hand over his eyes to shut out the maddening vision, with its ever-fresh pangs of poignant anguish, its persistent, unconquered and unconquerable despair!

"God help the Boy!" he prayed, as he strolled on into the solitude of the moonlit night. "No one else can! It is the call of the blood—the relentless lure of his heritage! From it there is no escape, as against it there is no appeal. It is the mad blood of youth, quickened and inten-

sified in the flame of inherited desire. I cannot save him!"

And then, with a sudden flood of tender, passionate, sacred memories, he added in his heart,

"And I would not, if I could!"

CHAPTER XII

PAUL VERDAYNE had many acquaintances and friends in New York, and much against their inclination he and the Boy soon found themselves absorbed in the whirl of frivolities. They were not very favorably impressed. It was all too extravagant for their Old World tastes—not too magnificent, for they both loved splendor—but it shouted its cost too loudly in their ears, and grated on their nerves and shocked their æsthetic sense.

The Boy was a favorite everywhere, even more so, perhaps, than in London. American society saw no mystery about him, and would not have cared if it had. If his face seemed somewhat familiar, as it often had to Opal Ledoux, no one puzzled his brains over it or searched the magazines to place it. New York accepted him, as it accepts all distinguished foreigners who have

no craving for the limelight of publicity, for his face value, and enjoyed him thoroughly. Women petted him, because he was so witty and chivalrous and entertaining, and always as exquisitely well-groomed as any belle among them; men were attracted to him because he had ideas and knew how to express them. He was worth talking to and worth listening to. He had formed opinions of his own upon most subjects. He had thought for himself and had the courage of his convictions, and Americans like that.

Naturally enough, before many days, at a fashionable ball at the Plaza he came into contact with Opal Ledoux again.

It was a new experience, this, to see the girl he loved surrounded by the admiration and attention of other men. In his own infatuation he had not realized that most men would be affected by her as he was, would experience the same maddening impulses—the same longing—the same thirst for possession of her. Now the fact came home to him with the force of an electric shock. He could not endure the burning

glances of admiration that he saw constantly directed toward her. What right had other men to devour her with their eyes?

He hastened to meet her. She greeted him politely but coldly, expressing some perfunctory regret when he asked for a dance, and showing him that her card was already filled. And then her partner claimed her, and she went away on his arm, smiling up into his face in a way she had that drove men wild for her. "The wicked little witch!" Paul thought. "Would she make eyes at every man like that? Dare she?"

A moment after, he heard her name, and instantly was all attention. The two men just behind him were discussing her rather freely—far too freely for the time and the place—and the girl, in Paul's estimation. He listened eagerly.

"Bold little devil, that Ledoux girl!" said one. "God! how she is playing her little game tonight! They say she is going to marry that old French Count, de Roannes! That's the fellow over there, watching her with the cat's eyes. I guess he thinks she means to have her fling first

—and I guess she thinks so too! As usual, it's the spectator who sees the best of the game. What a curious girl she is—a living paradox!"

"How's that?"

"Spanish, you know. Ought to have black hair instead of red—black eyes instead of—well, chestnut about expresses the color of hers. I call them witch's eyes, they're so full of fire and —the devil!"

"She's French, too, isn't she? That accounts for the eyes. The *beauté du diable,* hers is! Couldn't she make a heaven for a man if she would—or a hell?"

"Yes, it's in her! She's doomed, you know! Her grandmothers before her were bad women —regular witches, they say, with a good, big streak of yellow. Couldn't keep their heads on their shoulders—couldn't be faithful to any one man. Don't know as they tried!"

"I'll bet they made it interesting for the fellow while it did last, anyway! But this one will never be happy. She has a tragedy in her face, if ever a woman had. But she's a man's woman, all right, and she'd make life worth living if a

fellow had any red blood in him. She's one of those women who are born for nothing else in the world but to love, and be loved. Can't you shoot the Count?"

"The Count!—Hell! He won't be considered at all after a little! She'll find plenty of men glad to wake the devil in her—just to keep her from yawning! But she's not very tractable even now, though her sins all lie ahead of her! She's altogether too cool on the surface for her make-up, but—well, full of suggestion, and one feels a volcano surging and steaming just below the mask she wears, and has an insane desire to wake it up! That kind of woman simply can't help it."

A third voice broke in on the conversation—an older voice—the voice of a man who had lived and observed much.

"I saw her often as a child," he said, "a perilously wilful child, determined upon her own way, and possessed of her own fancies about this, that, and the other, which were seldom, if ever, the ideas of anyone else. There was always plenty of excitement where she was—always

that same disturbing air! Even with her pig-tails and pinafores, one could see the woman in her eyes. But she was a provoking little creature, always dreaming of impossible romances. Her father had his hands full."

"As her husband will have, poor devil! If he's man enough to hold her, all right. If he is not," with a significant shrug of the shoulders, "it's his own lookout!"

"That old French *roué* hold her? You're dreaming! She won't be faithful to him a week —if he has a handsome valet, or a half-way manly groom! How could she?" And they laughed coarsely.

The Boy gave them a look that should have annihilated all three, but they weren't noticing the Boy. He could have throttled them! How dared such lips as these pollute his darling's name! And yet these were society men—they could dance with her, clasp her to them, and look into those "witch eyes"—oh, the ignominy of it!

He looked across at Opal. How beautiful she was in her pale green gown, her white shoulders

and arms glistening beneath the electric light with the sheen of polished marble, her red-brown hair glowing with its fiery lure, while even across the room her eyes sparkled like diamonds, lighting up her whole face. She was certainly enjoying herself—this Circe who had tempted him across the seas. She seemed possessed of the very spirit of mischief—and Paul forgot himself.

The orchestra was playing a Strauss waltz—it fired his blood. He walked across the room with his masterful, authoritative air—the manner of a man born to command. "Miss Ledoux," he said, and the crowd around her instinctively made way for him, "this is our waltz, I believe!" and whirled her away before she could answer.

Ah! it was delicious, that waltz! In perfect rhythm they clung together, gliding about the polished floor, her bare shoulder pressing his arm, her head with its bewildering perfume so near his lips, their hearts throbbing fiercely in the ecstasy of their nearness—which was Love.

Oh to go on forever! forever!

The sweet cadence of the music died away, and they looked into each other's eyes, startled.

"You seem to be acquiring the habit," she pouted, but her lips quivered, and in response he whispered in her ear, "Whose waltz was it, sweetheart?"

"I don't know, Paul—nor care!"

That was enough.

They left the room together.

CHAPTER XIII

In a secluded corner adjoining the ballroom, Paul and Opal stood hand in hand, conscious only of being together, while their two hearts beat a tumultuous acknowledgment of that world-old power whose name, in whatever guise it comes to us, is Love!

"I said I wouldn't, Paul!" at last she said.

"Wouldn't what?"

"See you again—like this!"

Paul smiled tenderly.

"My darling," he whispered, "what enchantment have you cast over me that all my resolutions to give you up fade away at the first glimpse of your face? I resolve to be brave and remember my duty—until I see you—and then I forget everything but you—I want nothing but you!"

"What do you want with me, Paul?"

"Opal!" he cried impetuously. "After seeing these gay Lotharios making eyes at you all the evening, can you ask me that? I want to take you away and hide you from every other man's sight—that's what I want! It drives me crazy to see them look at you that way! But you have such a way of keeping a fellow at arm's length when you want to," he went on, ruefully, "in spite of the magic call of your whole tempting personality. You know *'Die Walküre,'* don't you?—but of course you do. If I believed in the theory of reincarnation, I should feel sure that you were Brünhilde herself, surrounded by the wall of fire!"

"I wish I were! I wish every woman had some such infallible way of *proving* every man who seeks her!"

"You have, Opal! You have your own womanly instincts—every woman's impassable wall of fire, if she will only hide behind them. *You* could never love unworthily!"

"But, Paul, don't you know? Haven't they told you? I shall probably marry the Count de Roannes!"

Paul was astounded.

"Opal! No! No! Not that, surely not that! I heard it, yes—a moment ago. But I could not believe it. The idea was too horrible. It could not be true!

"But it is true, Paul! It is all too true!"

"It is a crime," he fairly groaned.

She shrank from him. "Don't say that, Paul!"

"But you know it is true! Opal, just think! If you give your sweet self to him—and that is all you can give him, as you and I know—if you give yourself to him, I say, I—I shall go mad!"

"Yet women have loved him," she began, bravely, attempting to defend herself. "Women —some kinds of women—really love him now. He has a power of—compelling—love—even yet!"

"And such women," Paul cried hoarsely, "are more to be honored than you if you consent to become his property with no love in your heart! Don't plead extenuating circumstances. There can be no extenuating circumstances in all the world for such a thing."

She winced as though he had struck her, for she knew in her heart that what he said was true, brutally true. The Boy was only voicing her own sentiments—the theory to which she had always so firmly clung.

As Paul paused, a sudden realization of his own future overwhelmed him and locked his lips. He smiled sadly. Who was he that he should talk like that? Was not he, too, pleading extenuating circumstances? True, he was a man and she was a woman, and the world has two distinct standards—but—no less than she—he was selling himself for gain.

"Paul, Paul! I'm afraid you don't understand! It isn't *money*. Surely you don't think that! It isn't money—it is honor—*honor,* do you hear? My dead mother's honor, and my father's breaking heart!"

The secret was out, at last. This, then, was the shadow that had cast its gloom over the family ever since he had come in contact with them. It was even worse than he had thought. That she—the lovely Opal—should have to sacrifice her own honor to save her mother's!

Honor! honor! how many crimes are committed in thy name!

"Tell me about it," he said sympathetically.

And she told him, sparing herself details, as far as possible, of the storm of scandal about to burst upon the family—a storm from which only the sacrifice of herself could save the family name of Ledoux, and her mother's memory. It might, or might not, be true, but the Count de Roannes claimed to be able—and ready—to bring proof. And, if it were true, she was not a Ledoux at all, and her father was not her father at all, except in name. No breath of ill fame had ever reached her mother's name before. They had thought she had happily escaped the curse of her mother before her. But the Count claimed to know, and—well, he wanted her—Opal—and, of course, it *was* possible, and of course he would do anything to protect the good name of his wife, if Opal became his wife, and——

"So, you see, Paul—in the end, I shall have to—submit!"

She had not told it at all well, she thought, but Paul little cared how the story was told.

"I do not see it that way at all, Opal. It seems to me—well, diabolical, and may God help you, dear girl, when you, with your high-keyed sensitive nature, first wake to the infamy of it! I have no right to interfere—no right at all. Not even my love for you, which is stronger than myself, gives me that right. For I am betrothed! I tell you this because I see where my folly has led us. There is only one thing to do. We must part—and at once. I am sorry" —then he thought of that first meeting on board the liner, "no, I am *not* sorry we met! I shall never be that! But I am going to be a man. I am going to do my duty. Help me, Opal—help me!"

It was the old appeal of the man to the help-meet God had created for him, and the woman in her responded.

"Paul, I will!" and her little fingers closed over his.

"Of course he loves you—in his way, but——"

"Don't, Paul, don't! He has never once pretended that—he has been too wise."

"He will break your spirit, dear—it's his nature. And then he will break your heart!"

She raised her head, defiantly.

"Break my spirit, Paul? He could not. And as for my heart—that will never be his to break!"

Their eyes met with the old understanding that needs no words. Then she pointed to the heavens.

"See the stars, Paul, smiling down so calmly. How can they when hearts are aching? When I was a child, I loved the stars. I fancied, too, that they loved me, and I would run out under their watchful eyes, singing for very joy, sure they were guiding my life and that some day I would be happy, gloriously happy. Somehow, Paul, I always expected to be happy—always!—till now! Now the stars seem to mock me. I must have been born under a baleful conjunction, I guess. Oh, I told you, Paul, that Opals were unlucky. I warned you—didn't I warn

you? I may have tempted you, too, but—I didn't mean to do it!"

"Bless your dear heart, girl, you weren't to blame!"

"But you said—that night—about the tiger——"

"Forgive me, Opal, I was not myself. I was —excited. I didn't mean that."

After a moment, she said, musingly.

"It is just as I said, Paul. I was born to go to the devil, so it is well—well for you, I mean—and perhaps for me—that you and I cannot marry." He shook his head, but she went on, unheeding. "Paul, if I am destined to be a disgrace to someone—and they say I am—I'd rather bring reproach upon his name than on yours!"

"But why marry at all, if you feel like that? Why, it's—it's damnable!"

"Don't you see, Paul, I am foreordained to evil—marked a bad woman from the cradle! Marriage is the only salvation, you know, for girls with my inheritance. It's the sanctuary

that keeps a woman good and 'happy ever after.'"

"It would be more apt, in my opinion, to drive one to forbidden wine! A marriage like that, I mean—for one like you."

"But at least a married woman has a *name*—whatever she may do. She's—protected. She isn't——"

But Paul would hear no more.

"Opal, *we* were made for each other from the beginning—surely we were. Some imp has slipped into the scheme of things somewhere and turned it upside down."

He paused. She looked up searchingly into his eyes.

"Paul, do you love me?"

"Yes, dearest!"

"Are you sure?"

"As sure as I am of my own existence! With all my heart, Opal—with all my soul!"

"Then we mustn't see each other any more!"

"Not any more. You are right, Opal, not any more!"

"But what shall we do, Paul? We shall be

sure to meet often. You expect to stay the summer through, do you not? And we are not going to New Orleans for several weeks yet—and then?"

"We are going West, Father Paul and I—out on the prairies to rough it for a while. We were going before long, anyway, and a few weeks sooner or later won't make any difference. And then—home, back over the sea again, to face life, to work, to try to be—strong, I suppose."

Paul paused and looked at her passionately.

"Why are you so alluring to-night, Opal?"

Her whole body quivered, caught fire from the flame in his eyes. What was there about this man that made her always so conscious she was a woman? Why could she never be calm in his presence, but was always so fated to *feel, feel, feel!*

Her voice trembled as she looked up at him and answered,

"Am I wicked, Paul? I wanted to be happy to-night—just for to-night! I wanted to forget the fate that was staring me so relentlessly in the face. But—I couldn't, Paul!"

Then she glanced through the curtains into the ballroom and shuddered.

"The Count is looking for me," she said. The Boy winced, and she went on rapidly, excitedly. "We must part. As well now as any time, I suppose, since it has to be. But first, Paul, let me say it once—just once—*I love you!*"

He snatched her to him—God! that any one else should ever have the right!

"And I—worship you, Opal! Even that seems a weak word, to-night. But—you understand, don't you? I didn't know at sea whether it was love or what it was that had seized me as nothing ever had before. But I know now! And listen, Opal—this isn't a vow, nor anything of that kind—but I feel that I want to say it. I shall always love you just this way—always—I feel it, I know it!—as long as I live! Will you remember, darling?—remember—everything?"

"Yes—yes! And you, Paul?"

"Till death!" And his lips held hers, regardless of ten thousand Counts and their claims upon her caresses.

And they clung together again in the anguish

of parting that comes at some time or another into the lives of all who know love.

Then like mourners walking away from the graves of their loved ones, they returned to the ballroom, with the dull ache of buried happiness in their hearts.

CHAPTER XIV

Out—far out—in the great American West, the Boy wandered. And Paul Verdayne, understanding as only he could understand, felt how little use his companionship and sympathy really were at this crisis of the Boy's life.

All through the month of August they travelled, the Boy looking upon the land he had been so eager to see with eyes that saw nothing but his own disappointment, and the barrenness of his future. The hot sun beat down upon the shadeless prairies with the intensity of a living flame. But it seemed as nothing to the heat of his own passion—his own fiery rebellion against the decree of destiny—altogether powerless against the withering despair that had choked all the aspirations and ambitions which, his whole life long, he had cultivated and nourished in the soil of his developing soul.

He thought again and again of the glories so near at hand—the glories that had for years been

the goal of his ambition. He pictured the pageant to come—the glitter of armor and liveries, the splendor and sparkle of jewels and lights, and all the dazzling gorgeousness of royal equipments —the throngs of courtiers and beautiful women bowing before him, proud of the privilege of doing him homage—him, a mere boy—yet the king —the absolute monarch of his little realm, and supreme in his undisputed sway over the hearts of his people—his people who had worshipped his beautiful mother and, if only for her sake, made an idol of her son. He saw himself crowned by loving hands with the golden circlet he loved and reverenced, and meant to redeem from the stigma of a worthless father's abuse and desecration; he saw his own young hands, strong, pure, and undefiled by any form of bribery or political corruption, wielding the sceptre that should—please God!—bring everlasting honor and fame to the little principality. He saw all this, and yet it did not thrill him any more! It was all Dead Sea fruit, dust and ashes in his hand. He wanted but one thing now—and his whole kingdom did not weigh one pennyweight against it.

But in spite of his preoccupation the freedom and massiveness of the West broadened the Boy's mental vision. He absorbed the spirit of the big world it typified, and he saw things more clearly than in the crowded city. And yet he suffered more, too. He could not often talk about his sorrow and his loss, but he felt all the time the unspoken sympathy in Verdayne's companionship, and was grateful for the completeness of the understanding between them.

Once, far out in a wide expanse of sparsely settled land, the two came upon a hut—a little rough shanty with a sod roof, and probably but two tiny rooms at most. It was nearing evening, and the red rays of the setting sun fell upon a young woman, humbly clad, sitting on a bench at the doorway, and cuddling upon her knee a little baby dressed in coarse, but spotlessly white garments. A whistle sounded on the still air, and through the waving grain strode a stalwart man, an eager, expectant light in his bronzed face. The girl sprang to meet him with an inarticulate cry of joy, and wife and baby were soon clasped close to his breast.

Paul could not bear it. He turned away with a sob in his throat and looked into Verdayne's eyes with such an expression of utter hopelessness that the older man felt his own eyes moisten with the fervor of his sympathy. That poor, humble ranchman possessed something that was denied the Boy, prince of the blood though he was.

And the two men talked of commonplace subjects that night in subdued tones that were close to tears. Both hearts were aching with the consciousness of unutterable and irreparable loss.

Through the long nights that followed, out there in the primitive, Paul thought of the hideousness of life as he saw it now, with a loathing that time seemed only to increase. He pictured Opal—his love—as the wife of that old French libertine, till his soul revolted at the very thought. Such a thing was beyond belief.

Once he said to Verdayne, thinking of the conversation he had had with Opal on the night of the ball at the Plaza,

"Father Paul, who was Lord Hubert Aldring-

ham? The name sounds so familiar to me—yet I can't recall where I heard it."

"Why, he was my uncle, Boy, my mother's brother. A handsome, wicked, devil-may-care sort of fellow to whom nothing was sacred. You must have heard us speak of him at home, for mother was very fond of him."

"And you, Father Paul?"

"I—detested him, Boy!"

And then the Boy told him something that Opal had said to him of the possibility—nay, the probability—of Lord Hubert's being her own grandfather. Verdayne was pained—grieved to the heart—at the terrible significance of this—if it were true. And there was little reason, alas, to doubt it! How closely their lives were woven together—Paul's and Opal's! How merciless seemed the demands of destiny!

What a juggler of souls Fate was!

And the month of August passed away. And September found the two men still wandering in an aimless fashion about the prairie country, and

yet with no desire for change. The Boy was growing more and more dissatisfied, less and less resigned to the decrees of destiny.

At last, one dull, gray, moonless night, when neither could woo coveted sleep to his tired eyes, the Boy said to his companion, "Father Paul, I'm going to be a man—a man, do you hear? I am going to New Orleans—you know Mr. Ledoux asked us to come in September—and I'm going to marry Opal, whatever the consequences! I will not be bound to a piece of flesh I abhor, for the sake of a mere kingdom—not for the sake of a world! I will not sell my manhood! I will not sacrifice myself, nor allow the girl I love to become a burnt-offering for a mother's sin. I will not! Do you remember away off there," and he pointed off to the south of them, "the little shack, and the man and the woman and—the baby? Father Paul, I want—that! And I'm going to have it, too! Do you blame me?"

And Verdayne threw his arm around the Boy's neck, and said, "Blame you? No, Boy, no! And may God bless and speed you!"

And the next day they started for the South.

CHAPTER XV

It was early in the morning, a few days later, when Paul Verdayne and his young friend reached New Orleans. Immediately after breakfast—he would have presented himself before had he dared—the Boy called at the home of the Ledouxs. Verdayne had important letters to write, as he informed the Boy with a significant smile, and begged to be allowed to remain behind.

And the impatient youth, blessing him mentally for his tact, set forth alone.

The residence that he sought was one of the most picturesque and beautiful of the many stately old mansions of the city. It was enclosed by a high wall that hid from the passers-by all but the most tantalizing glimpses of a fragrant, green tropical garden, and gave an air of exclusiveness to the habitation of this proud old family. As

the Boy passed through the heavy iron gate, and his eye gazed in appreciation upon the tints of foliage no autumn chills had affected, and the glints of sun and shadow that only heightened the splendor of blossom, and shrub, and vine, which were pouring their incense upon the air, he felt that he was indeed entering the Garden of Eden—the Garden of Eden with no French serpents to tempt from him the woman that had been created his helpmeet.

He found Opal, and a tall, handsome young man in clerical vestments, sitting together upon the broad vine-shaded veranda. The girl greeted him cordially and introduced him to the priest, Father Whitman.

At first Paul dared not trust himself to look at Opal too closely, and he did not notice that her face grew ashen at his approach. She had recovered her usual self-possession when he finally looked at her, and now the only apparent sign of unusual agitation was a slight flush upon her cheek—an excited sparkle in her eye—which might have been the effect of many causes.

He watched the priest curiously. How noble-

looking he was! He felt sure that he would have liked him in any other garb. What did his presence here portend?

Paul had supposed that Opal was a Catholic; indeed had been but little concerned what she professed. She had never appeared to him to be specially religious, but, if she was, that absurd idea of self-sacrifice for a dead mother she had never known might appeal to the love of penance which is inherent in all of Catholic faith, and she might not surrender to her great love for him.

The priest rose.

"Must you go, Father?" asked Opal.

"Yes! . . . I will call to-morrow, then?"

"Yes—to-morrow! And"—she suddenly threw herself upon her knees at his feet—"your blessing, Father," she begged.

The priest laid a hand upon her head, and raised his eyes to Heaven. Then, making the sign of the cross upon her forehead, he took her hands in his, and gently raised her to her feet. She clung to his hands imploringly.

"Absolution, Father," she pleaded.

He hesitated, his face quivering with emotion, his eyes lustrous with tears, a world of feeling in every line of his countenance.

"Child," he said hoarsely, "child! Don't tempt me!"

"But you *must* say it, you know, or what will happen to me?"

The priest still hesitated, but her eyes would not release him till he whispered, "*Absolvo te,* my daughter, and—God bless you!"

And releasing her hands, he bowed formally to Paul and hurried down the broad stone steps and through the gate.

Opal watched him, a smile, half-remorseful and half-triumphant, upon her face.

"What does it all mean?" asked Paul as he laid his hand upon her arm.

She laughed nervously. "Oh—nothing! Only —when I see one of those long, clerical cassocks, I am immediately seized with an insane desire to find the *man* inside the priest!"

"Laudable, certainly! And you always succeed, I suppose?"

"Yes, usually!—why not?" And she laughed

again. "Don't, Paul! I don't want to quarrel with you!"

"We won't quarrel, Opal," he said. But the thought of the priest annoyed him.

He seated himself beside her. "Have you no welcome for me?" he said.

She looked up at him, her eyes sweetly tender.

"Of course, Paul! I'm very glad to see you again—if you are a bad boy!"

He looked at her in amazement. "I, bad?—No," he said. And they laughed again. But it was not the care-free laughter they had known at sea. There was a strained note in the tones of the girl that grated strangely upon the Boy's sensitive ear. What had happened? he wondered. What was the new barrier between them? Was it the priest? Again the thought of the priest worried him.

"Where is my friend, the Count de Roannes?" he ventured at last.

"He sailed for Paris last week."

Paul's heart leaped. Surely then their legal betrothal had not taken place.

"What happened, Opal?"

"The inevitable!"

And again his heart bounded for joy! The inevitable! Surely that meant that the girl's better nature had triumphed, had shown her the ignominy of such a union in time to save her. He looked at her for further information, but seeing her evident embarrassment, forbore to pursue the question further.

They wandered out through the luxurious garden, and the spell of its enchantment settled upon them both.

He pulled a crimson rose from a bush and began listlessly to strip the thorns from the stalk. "Roses in September," he said, "are like love in the autumn of life."

And they both thought again of the Count and a chill passed over their spirits. The girl watched him curiously.

"Do you always cut the thorns from your roses?" she asked.

"Certainly—sooner or later. Don't you?"

"O no! I am a woman, you see, and I only hold my rose tightly in my fingers and smile in

spite of the pricks as if to convince the world that my rose has no thorns."

"Is that honest?"

"Perhaps not—but—yes, I think it is! If one really loves a rose, you see, one forgets that it has thorns—really forgets!"

"Until too late!"

But there was some undercurrent of hidden meaning even in this subject, and Paul tried another.

He asked her about the books she had read since they parted and told her of his travels. He painted for her a picture of the little cabin on the western prairie, with its man and its woman and its baby, and she listened with a strange softness in her eyes. He felt that she understood.

There was a tiny lake in the garden, and they sat upon the shore and looked into the water, at an unaccountable loss for words. At last Paul, with a boyish laugh, relieved the situation by rolling up his sleeve and dabbling for pebbles in the sand at the bottom.

There was not much said—only a word now and then, but both, in spite of their consciousness

of the barrier between them, were rejoicing in the fact that they were together, while Paul, happy in his new-born resolution, was singing in his heart.

Should he tell her now?

He looked up quickly.

"Opal," he said, "you knew I would come."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because—I love you!"

The girl tried to laugh away the serious import of his tone.

"I am not looking for men to love me, Paul," she said.

"No, that's the trouble. You never have to."

He turned away again and for a few moments had no other apparent aim in life than a careful scrutiny of the limpid water.

Somehow he felt a chill underlying her most casual words to-day. What had become of the freemasonry between them they had both so readily recognized on shipboard?

Just then Gilbert Ledoux and his wife strolled into the garden. They were genuinely pleased to see Paul and insisted on keeping him for lunch-

eon. The conversation drifted to his western trip and other less personal things and not again did he have an opportunity to talk alone with Opal.

Paul took his departure soon after, promising to return for dinner, and to bring Verdayne with him. Then, he resolved to himself, he would tell Opal why he had come. Then he would claim her as his wife—his queen!

And Paul kept his word.

That evening they found themselves alone in a deep-recessed window facing the dimly-lighted street.

"Opal," said Paul, "do you know why I have come to New Orleans? Can't you imagine, dear?"

She instantly divined the tenor of his thoughts, and shook her head in a tremor of sudden fright.

"I have come to tell you that I have fought it all out and that I cannot live without you. Though I am breaking my plighted troth, I ask you to become my wife!"

Her eyes glistened with a strange lustre.

"Oh, Paul! Paul!" she murmured, faintly. "Why did you not say this before—or—why do you tell me now?"

"Because now I know I love you more than all the world—more than my duty—more than my life! Is that enough?"

And Paul was about to break into a torrent of passionate appeal, when Gilbert Ledoux joined them and, shortly after, Mrs. Ledoux called Opal to her side.

Opal looked miserably unhappy. Why was she not rejoicing? Paul knew that she loved him. Nothing could ever make him doubt that. As he stood wondering, idly exchanging platitudes with his genial host, Mrs. Ledoux spoke in a tone of ringing emphasis that lingered in Paul's ears all the rest of his life, "I think, Opal, it is time to share our secret!"

And then, as the girl's face paled, and her frail form trembled with the force of her emotion, her mother hastened to add, "Gentlemen, you will rejoice with us that our daughter was last week formally betrothed to the Count de Roannes!"

The inevitable *had* happened.

CHAPTER XVI

How the remainder of the evening passed, Paul Zalenska never knew. As he looked back upon it, during the months that followed, it seemed like some hideous dream from which he was struggling to awake. He talked, he smiled, he even laughed, but scarcely of his own volition; it was as though another personality acted through him.

He was a temperate boy, but that night he drank more champagne than was good for him. Paul Verdayne was grieved. Not that he censured the lad. He knew only too well the anguish the Boy was suffering, and he could not find it in his heart to blame him for the dissipation. And yet Verdayne also knew how unavailing were all such attempts to drown the sorrow that had so shocked the Boy's sensitive spirit.

As he gazed regretfully at the Boy across the dinner table, the butler placed a cablegram be-

fore him. Receiving a nod of permission from his hostess, he hastily tore open the envelope and paled at its contents.

The message was signed by the Verdaynes' solicitor, and read:

Sir Charles very ill. Come immediately.

Before they left the house, Paul sought Opal for a few last words. There were no obstacles placed in his way now by anxious parental authority. He smiled cynically as he noticed how clear the way was made for him, now that Opal was "safeguarded" by her betrothal.

She drew him to one side, whispering, "Before you judge me too harshly, Paul, please listen to what I have to say. I feel I have the right to make this explanation, and you have the right to hear it. Under the French law, I am legally bound to the Count de Roannes. Fearing that I might not remain true to a mere verbal pledge—you knew we were engaged, Paul, for I told you that,

last summer—the Count asked that the betrothal papers be executed before his unavoidable return to Paris. Knowing no real reason for delay, since it had to come some time, I consented; but I stipulated that I was to have six months of freedom before becoming his wife. Arrangements have been made for us all to go abroad next spring, and we shall be married in Paris. Paul, I did not tell you this, this afternoon—I could not! I wanted to see you—the real you—just once more, before you heard the bitter news, for I knew that after you had heard, you would never look or speak the same to me again. Oh, Paul, pity me! Pity me when I tell you that I asked for those six months simply that I might dedicate them to you, and to the burial, in my memory, of our little dream of love! It was only my little fancy, Paul! I wanted to play at being constant that long to our dream. I wanted to wear my six-months' mourning for our still-born love. I thought it was only a little game of 'pretend' to you, Paul—why should it be anything else? But it was very real to me."

Her voice broke, and the Boy took her hand in

his, tenderly, for his resentment had long since died away.

"Opal," he faltered, "I no longer know nor care who or what I am. This experience has taken me out of myself, and set my feet in strange paths. I had a life to live, Opal, but I have forgotten it in yours. I had theories, ideals, hopes, aspirations—but I don't know where they are now, Opal. They are gone—gone with your smile——"

Opal's eyes grew soft with caresses.

"They will come back, Paul—they must come back! They were born in you—of Truth itself, not of a mere woman. You will forget me, Boy, and your life will not be the pitiful waste you think. It must not be!"

"I used to think that, Opal. It never seemed to me that life could ever be an utter waste so long as a man had work to do and the strength and skill to do it. But now—I'm all at sea! I only know—how—I shall miss *you!*"

Opal grew thoughtful.

"And how will it be with me?" she said sadly. "I have never learned to wear a mask. I can't pose. I can't wear 'false smiles that cover an

aching heart.' Perhaps the world may teach me now—but I'm not a hypocrite—yet!"

"I believe you, Opal! I love you because you are *you!*"

"And I love you, Paul, because you are you!"

And even then he did not clasp her in his arms, nor attempt it. She was another's now, and his hands were tied. He must try to control his one great weakness—the longing for her.

And in the few moments left to them, they talked and cheered each other, as intimate friends on the eve of a long separation. They both knew now that they loved—but they also knew that they must part—and forever!

"I love you, Paul," said Opal, "even as you love me. I do not hesitate to confess it again, because—well, I am not yet his wife. And I want to give you this one small comfort to help to make you strong to fight and conquer, and—endure!"

"But, Opal, you are the one woman in the world God meant for me! How can I face the world without you?"

"Better that you should, Paul, and keep on fancying yourself loving me always, than that you

should have me for a wife, and then weary of me, as men do weary of their wives!"

"Opal! Never!"

"Oh, but you might, Boy. Most men do. It's their nature, I suppose."

"But it is not *my* nature, Opal, to grow tired of what I love. I am not capricious. Why should you think so?"

"But it's human nature, Paul; there is no denying that. To think, Paul, that we could grow to clasp hands like this—that we could kiss—actually kiss, Paul, *calmly,* as women kiss each other—that we could ever rest in each other's arms and grow weary!"

But Paul would not listen. He always would have loved her, always! He loved her, anyway, and always would, were she a thousand times the Countess de Roannes, but it was too late! too late!

"Always remember, Paul, wherever you are and whatever you do," went on Opal, "that I love you. I know it now, and I know how much! Let the memory of it be an inspiration to you when your spirits flag, and a consolation when skies are

gray, and—Paul—oh, I love you—love you—that's all! Kiss me—just once—our last good-bye! There can be no harm in that, when it's for the last time!"

And Paul, with a heart-breaking sob, clasped her in his arms and pressed his lips to hers as one kisses the face of his beloved dead. He wondered vaguely why he felt no passion—wondered at the utter languor of the senses that did not wake even as he pressed his lips to hers. It was not a woman's body in his arms—but as the sexless form of one long dead and lost to him forever. It was not passion now—it was love, stripped of all sensuality, purged of all desire save the longing to endure.

It was the hour of love's supremest triumph—renunciation!

CHAPTER XVII

BACK in England again—England in the fall of the year—England in the autumn of life, for Sir Charles Verdayne was nearing his end. The Boy spent a few weeks at Verdayne Place, and then left to pay his first visit to his fiancée. Paul Verdayne was prevented by his father's ill health from accompanying him to Austria, as had been the original plan.

Opal had asked of the Boy during that last strange hour they had spent together that he should make this visit, and bow obediently to the call of destiny—as *she* had done. She did not know who he really was, nor what station in life his fiancée graced, but she did know that it was his duty bravely and well to play his part in the drama of life, whatever the rôle. She would not have him shirk. It was a horrible thing, she had said with a shudder—none knew it better than she

—but she would be glad all her life to think that he had been no coward, and had not cringed beneath the bitterest blow of fate, but had been strong because she loved him and believed in him.

And so, since Paul Verdayne could not be absent from his father's side, with many a reluctant thought the Boy set forth for Austria alone.

During his absence, Isabella—she who had been Isabella Waring—returned from Blackheath a widow with two grown daughters—two more modern editions of the original Isabella. The widow herself was graver and more matronly, yet there was much of the old Isabella left, and Verdayne was glad to see her. Lady Henrietta gave her a cordial invitation to visit Verdayne Place, which she readily accepted, passing many pleasant hours with the friend of her youth and helping to while away the long days that Verdayne found so tiresome when the Boy was away from him.

Isabella was still "a good sort," and made life much less unbearable than it might have been, but Verdayne often smiled to think of the "puppy-love" he had once felt for her. It was amusing,

now, and they both laughed over it—though Isabella would not have been a woman had she not wondered at times why her "old pal" had never married. There had been chances, lots of them, for the girls had always liked the blue-eyed, manly boy he had been, and petted and flattered and courted him all through his youth. Why hadn't he chosen one of them? Had he really cared so much for her—Isabella? And she often found herself looking with much pitying tenderness upon the lonely man, whose heart seemed so empty of the family ties it should have fostered—and wondering.

Lady Henrietta, too, was set to thinking as the days went by, and turning, one night, to her son, "Paul," she said, "I begin to think that perhaps I was wrong in separating you from the girl you loved, and so spoiling your life. Isabella would have made you a fairly good wife, I believe, as wives go, and you must forgive your mother, who meant it for the best. She did not see the way clearly, then, and so denied you the one great desire of your heart."

She looked at him closely, but his heart was

no longer worn upon his sleeve, and finding his face non-committal, she went on slowly, feeling her way carefully as she advanced.

"Perhaps it is not too late now, my son. Don't let my prejudices stand in your way again, for you are still young enough to be happy, and I shall be truly glad to welcome any wife—any!"

Verdayne did not reply. His eyes were studying the pattern of the rug beneath his feet. His mother's face flushed with embarrassment at the delicacy of the subject, but she stumbled on bravely.

"Paul," she said, "Isabella is young yet, and you are not so very old. It may not, even now, be too late to hold a little grandchild on my knee before I die. I have been so fond of Paul—he is so very like you when you were a boy—and have wished —oh, you don't know how a mother feels, Paul— I have often wished that he were your son, or that I might have had a grandson just like him. Do you know, Paul, I have often fancied that your son, had you had one, would have been very like this dear Boy."

Verdayne choked back a sob. If his mother

could only understand as some women would have understood! If he could have told her the truth! But, no, he never could. Even now it would have been a terrible shock to her, and she could never have forgiven, never held up her head again, if she had known.

As for marrying Isabella—could he? After all, was it right to let the old name die out for want of an heir? Was it just to his father? And Isabella would not expect to be made love to. There was never that sort of nonsense about her, and she would make all due allowance for his age and seriousness.

His mother felt she had been very kind and generous in renouncing the old objection of twenty years' standing, and, too, she felt that it was only right, after spoiling her son's life for so long, to do her best to atone for the mistake. It must be confessed she could not see what there was about Isabella to hold the love and loyalty of a man like Paul for so long, but then—and she sighed at the thought of the wasted years—"Love is blind," they say—and so's a lover! And her

motherly heart longed for grandchildren—Paul's children—as it had always longed for them.

Paul Verdayne sat opposite his penitent mother and pondered. The scent from a bowl of red roses on his mother's table almost overpowered him with memories.

He thought of the couch of deep red roses on which he had lain, caressed by the velvet petals. He could inhale their fragrance even yet—he could look into her eyes and breathe the incense of her hair—her whole glorious person—that was like none other in all the world. Yes, she had been happy—and he would remember! She would be happier yet could she know that he had been faithful to his duty—and surely this was his duty to his race. His Queen would have it so, he felt sure.

Rising, he bent over his mother, his eyes bright with unshed tears, and kissed her calmly upon the brow. Then he walked quietly from the room. His resolution was firmly fixed.

He would marry Isabella!

CHAPTER XVIII

SIR CHARLES VERDAYNE lingered for several weeks, no stronger, nor yet perceptibly weaker. He took a sudden fancy to see his old friend, Captain Grigsby, and the old salt was accordingly sent for. His presence acted as a tonic upon the dying man, and the two old friends spent many pleasant hours together, talking—as old people delight in talking—of the days of the distant past.

"Is this widow the Isabella who once raised the devil with your Paul?" asked Grigsby.

"Same wench!" answered Sir Charles, a twinkle in his eye.

"Hum!" said the Captain—and then said again, "Hum!" Then he added meditatively, "Blasted unlucky kiss that! Likely wench enough, but—never set the Thames on fire!—nor me!"

"Oh the kiss didn't count," said Sir Charles.

"As I said to the boy's mother at the time, a man isn't obliged to marry every woman he kisses! Mighty good thing, too—eh, Grig? Besides, a kiss like that is an insult to any flesh and blood woman!"

"An insult?"

"The worst kind! You see, Grig, no woman likes to be kissed that way. Whether she's capable of feeling a single thrill of passion herself or not, she likes to be sure that she can inspire it in a man. And a kiss like that—well, it rouses all her fighting blood! Makes her feel she's no woman at all in the man's eye—merely a doll to be kissed. D'ye see? It's damned inconsistent, of course, but it's the woman of it!"

"The devil of it, you mean!" the old Captain chuckled in response. Then, "Paul had a lucky escape," he said, as he looked furtively around the room for listening ears, "mighty lucky escape! And an experience right on the heels of it to make up for the loss of a hundred such wenches and—say, Charles, he's got a son to be proud of! The Boy is certainly worth all the price!"

"Any price—any price, Grig!" Then the old

man went on, "If Henrietta only knew! She thinks the world of the youngster, you know—no one could help that—but what if she knew? Paul's been mighty cautious. I often laugh when I see them out together—him and the Boy—and think what a sensation one could spring on the public by letting the cat out of the bag. And the woman would suffer. Wouldn't she, just! Wouldn't they tear her to pieces!"

"Yes, they would," said the Captain, "they certainly would. This is a world of hypocrites, Charles, damned rotten hypocrites!"

"That's what it is, Grig! Not one of those same old hens who would have said, 'Ought we to visit her?' and denounced the whole 'immoral' affair, and all that sort of thing—not one of them, I say, but would——"

"Give her very soul to know what such a love means! O they would, Charles—they would—every damned old cat of them, who would never get an opportunity to play the questionable—no, not one in a thousand years—if they searched for it forever!"

"Yet women are made so, Grigsby—they can't

help it! Henrietta would faint at the mere suggestion of accepting as a daughter-in-law a woman with a past!"

And the old man sighed.

"I'd have given my eyes—yes, I would, Grig—to have seen that woman just once! God! the man she made out of my boy! Of course it may have been for the best that it turned out as it did, but—damn it all, Grig, she was worth while! There's no dodging that!"

"Nobody wants to dodge it, Charles! She was over-sexed, perhaps—but better that than under-sexed—eh?"

But the exhilaration caused by the coming of his old friend gradually wore itself away, and Sir Charles began to grow weaker. And at last the end came. He had grown anxious to see the Boy again, and the young fellow had returned and spent much time with the old man, who loved the sound of his voice as it expressed his fresh, frank ideas.

But Sir Charles spent his last hours with his son.

"Paul," he said, in a last confidential whisper, touching upon the theme that had never been mentioned between them before, "I understand—everything—you know, and I'm proud of you—and him! I have wanted to say something, or do something for you—often—often—to help you—but it's the sort of thing a chap has to fight out for himself, and I thought I'd better keep out of it! But I wanted you to know—*now*—that I've known it all—all along—and been proud of you—both!"

And their hands clasped closely, and the eyes of both were wet, but even on the brink of death the lips of the younger man were sealed. The silence of one-and-twenty years remained unbroken. It was not a foolish reticence that restrained him—but simply that he could not find words to voice the memories that grew more and more sacred with the passing of the years.

And at evening, when the family had gathered about him, the old man lay with his son's hand in his, but his eyes looked beyond and rested on the

face of the Boy, who seemed the renewal of his son's youth, when life was one glad song! And thus he passed to the Great Beyond.

And his son was Sir Paul Verdayne, the last of his race.

That night, the young baronet and the Boy sat alone over their cigars. The Boy spoke at some length of his extensive Austrian visit. The Princess Elodie would make him a good wife, he said. She was of good sturdy stock, healthy, strong—and, well, a little heavy and dull, perhaps, but one couldn't expect everything! At least, her honor would never be called into question. He would always feel sure that his name was safe with her! He was glad he went to Austria. There were political complications that he had not understood before which made the marriage an absolute necessity for the salvation of his country's position among the kingdoms of the world, and he was more resigned to it now. Yes, indeed, he was far more resigned. The princess wasn't by any means impossible—not a half bad sort—and—yes, he was resigned! He said it over and

over, but without convincing Sir Paul—or deceiving himself!

As for the elder man, he said but little. He had been wondering throughout that dinner-hour whether he could ever really make Isabella his wife. The Boy thought of Isabella, too, and was anxious to know whether his Father Paul was going to be happy at last. He had been very curious to see the woman who could play so cruel a part toward the man he loved. If he had been Verdayne, he thought, he would never forgive her—never! Still, if Father Paul loved the woman—as he certainly must to have remained single for her sake so long—it put a different face on the matter, and of course it was Verdayne's affair, not his! The Boy had been disappointed in Isabella's appearance and attractions—she was not at all the woman he had imagined his Father Paul would love—but of course she was older now, and age changes some women, and, and—well, he only hoped that his friend would be happy—happy in his own way, whatever that might be.

At last, he summoned Vasili to him and called for his own particular yellow wine—the Imperial

Tokayi—and the old man filled the glasses. It was too much for Verdayne—and all thoughts of Isabella were consigned to eternal oblivion as he remembered the time when *he* had sipped that wine with his Queen in the little hotel on the Bürgenstock.

She would have no cause for jealousy—his darling!

CHAPTER XIX

It was November when Sir Charles died, and Lady Henrietta betook herself to her sister's for consolation, while Sir Paul and the Boy, with a common impulse, departed for India.

They spent Christmas in Egypt, the winter months in the desert, and at last spring came, with its remembrance of duties to be done. And to the elder man England made its insistent call, as it always did in March. For was it not in England, and in March, the tidings reached him that unto him a son was born?

He must go back.

So at last, acting upon a pre-arrangement to which the young Prince had not been a party, they made their way back to their own world of men and women.

"Boy," said Sir Paul, one day, "the time has come when many questions you have asked

and wondered about are to be answered, as is your due. It was your mother's wish that you should go, at the beginning of May, alone, to Lucerne. There you will find letters awaiting you —from her—from your Uncle Peter—yes, even from myself—telling you the whole secret of your birth, the story of your inheritance."

"Why Lucerne, Father Paul?"

"It was your mother's wish—and mine!"

Then, with a rush of tenderness, the older man threw his arm around the Boy's shoulders. "Boy," he said, "be charitable and lenient and kind—whatever you read!"

"And what are you going to do, Father Paul? I have not quite two weeks of freedom left, and I begrudge every day I am forced to spend away from you. You will go with me to see me crowned —and married?"

"Certainly, Boy! You are to stay in Lucerne only until you are sure you understand all the revelations of these letters, and their full import. It may be a week—it may be a day—it may be but a few hours, but—I can't go with you, and you must not ask me to! It is an experience you

must face alone. I will await you in Venice, Paul, and be sure that when you want me, Boy, I will come!"

The Boy's sensitive nature was stirred to the depths by the emotion in Sir Paul's face—emotion that all his life long he had never seen there before. He grasped his hand—

"Father Paul," he began, but Sir Paul shook his head at the unspoken appeal in his face and bade him be patient just a little longer and await his letters, for he could tell him nothing.

And thus they parted; the Boy to seek in Lucerne the unveiling of his destiny, the man to wait in Venice, a place he had shunned for one-and-twenty years, but which was dearer to him than any other city in the world. It was there that he had lived the climax of his love-life, with its unutterable ecstasy—and unutterable pain.

Vasili had preceded his young master to Lucerne with the letters that had been too precious, and of too secret a nature, to be entrusted to the post. Who can define the sensations of the young prince as he held in his hand the whole solution of the mystery that had haunted all his years? He

trembled—paled. What was this secret—perhaps this terrible secret—which was to be a secret no longer?

Alone in his apartment, he opened the little packet and read the note from the Regent, which enclosed the others, and then—he could read no further. The few words of information that there stared him in the face drove every other thought from his mind, every other emotion from his heart. His father! Why hadn't he seen? Why hadn't he known? A thousand significant memories rushed over him in the light of the startling revelation. How blind he had been! And he sat for hours, unheeding the flight of time, thinking only the one thought, saying over and over again the one name, the name of his father, his own father, whom he had loved so deeply all his life—

Paul Verdayne!

CHAPTER XX

At last, when he felt that he could control his scattered senses, he turned over the letters in the packet and found his mother's. How his boyish heart thrilled at this message from the dead!—a message that he had waited for, and that had been waiting for him, one-and-twenty years!

The letter began:

"Once, my baby, thy father—long before he was thy father—had a presentiment that if he became my lover my life would find a tragic end.

"Once, likewise, I told thy father, before he became my lover, that the price we might have to pay, if we permitted ourselves to love, would be sorrow and death! For, my baby, these are so often the terrible cost of such a love as ours. That he has been my lover—my beloved—heart of my heart—thine own existence is the living proof; and something—an intangible something—tells

me that the rest of his prophecy will likewise be fulfilled. We have known the sorrow—aye, as few others have—and even now I feel that we shall also know death!

"It is because of this curious presentiment of mine that I write down for thee, my baby—my baby Paul—this story of thy father and thy mother, and the great love that gave thee to the world. It is but right, before thou comest into thy kingdom, that thou shouldst know—thou and thou alone—the secret of thy birth, that thou mayst carry with thee into the big world thy birthright—the sweetness of a supreme love."

Then briefly, but as completely and vividly as the story could be written, she pictured for him the beautiful idyl she and her lover had lived, here in this very spot, two-and-twenty years ago; told him, in her own quaint words, of the beautiful boy she had found in Lucerne, that glorious May so long ago, and how it had been her caprice to waken him, until the caprice had become her love, and afterwards her life; told him how she had seen the danger, and had warned the boy to leave Lucerne, while there was yet time, but that he had answered that he would chance the hurt, be-

cause he wished to live, and he knew that only she could teach him how—only she could prove to him the truth of her own words, that *life was love!*

She told how weary and unhappy she had been, picturing with no light fingers the misery of her life—married when a mere child to a vicious husband—and all the insults and brutality she was forced to endure; and then, for contrast, told him tenderly how she had been young again for this boy she had found in Lucerne.

There was not one little detail of that idyllic dream of love omitted from the picture she drew for him of these two—and their sublime three weeks of life on the Bürgenstock with their final triumphant, but bitter culmination in Venice. She told him of what they had been pleased to call their wedding—the wedding of their souls—nor did she seek to lessen the enormity of their sin.

She touched with the tenderest of fingers upon the first dawn in their hearts of the hope of the coming of a child—a child who would hold their souls together forever—a child who would immortalize their love till it should live on, and on,

and on, through countless generations perhaps—till who could say how much the world might be benefited and helped just because they two had loved!

And then she told him—sweetly, as a mother should—of all her dreams for her son—all her hopes and ambitions that were centered around his little life—the life of her son who was to redeem the land—told him how ennobled and exalted she had felt that this strong, manly Englishman was her lover, and how sure she had been that their child would have a noble mind.

"Thou wilt think my thoughts, my baby Paul—thou wilt dream my dreams, and know all my ambitions and longings. Thou canst not be ignoble or base, for thou wert born of a love that makes all other unions mean and low and sordid by comparison."

Then, after telling, as only she could tell it, of the bitterness of that parting in Venice, when, because of the threatening danger, from which there was no escape, she left her lover to save his life, she went on:

"Dost thou know yet, when thou readest this, little Paul, with thy father's eyes—dost thou know, I wonder, the meaning of that great love which to the twain who realize it becomes a sacrament—dost understand?—a sacrament holier even than a prayer. It was even so with thy father and me—dost thou—canst thou understand? If not yet, sometime thou wilt, and thou wilt then forgive thy mother for her sin."

She told of the taunts and persecutions to which she was forced to submit upon her return to her kingdom. The king and his friends had vilely commended her for her "patriotism" in finding an heir to the throne. "Napoleon would have felt honored," her husband had sneered, "if Josephine had adopted thy method of finding him the heir he desired!" But through it all, she said, she had not faltered. She had held the one thought supreme in her heart and remembered that however guilty she might be in the eyes of the world, there was a higher truth in the words of Mrs. Browning, "God trusts me with a child," and had dared to pray.

"To pray for strength and grace and wisdom to give thee birth, my baby, and to make thee all that thou shouldst be—to develop thee into the man I and thy father would have thee become. I was not only giving an heir to the throne of my realm. I was giving a son to the husband of my soul. But the world did not know that. Whatever it might suspect, it could actually know—nothing! The secret was thy father's and mine—his and mine alone—and now it is thine, as it needs must be! Guard it well, my baby, and let it make thy life and thy manhood full of strength and power and sweetness and glory and joy, and remember, as thou readest for the first time this story of thy coming into the world, that thy mother counted it her greatest, proudest glory to be the chosen love of thy father, and the mother of his son."

She had touched as lightly as she could upon the dark hours of her baby's coming, when she was doomed to pass through that Valley of the Shadow far away from the protecting and comforting love of him whose right it was by every law of Nature to have been, then of all times, by her side; but the Boy felt the pathos of it, and his eyes filled with tears. His mother—the mother

of his dreams—his glorious queen-mother—to suffer all this for him—for him!

And Father Paul!—his own father! What must this cross have been to him! Surely he would love him all the rest of his life to make up for all that suffering!

Then he thought of the other letters and he read them all, his heart torn between grief and anger—for they told him all the appalling details of the tragedy that had taken his mother from him, and left his father and himself bereaved of all that made life dear and worth the living to man and boy.

One of the letters was from Sir Paul, telling the story over again from the man's point of view, and laying bare at last the great secret the Boy had so often longed to hear. Nothing was kept back. Even every note—every little scrap of his mother's writing—had been sacredly kept and was now enclosed for the eyes of their son to read. The closed door in Father Paul's life was unlocked now, and his son entered and understood, wondering why he had been so blind that he had not seen it all before. The writing

on the wall had certainly been plain enough. And he smiled to remember the readiness with which he had believed the plausible story of Isabella Waring!

And that man—the husband of his mother—the king who had taken her dear life from her with a curse upon his lips! Thank God he was not his father! No, in all the world of men, there was no one but Paul Verdayne—no one—to whom he would so willingly have given the title—and to him he had given it in his heart long before.

He sat and read the letters through again, word by word, living in imagination the life his mother had lived, feeling all she had felt. God! the bliss, the agony of it all!

And Paul Zalenska, surrounded by the messages from the past that had given him being, and looking at the ruin of his own life with eyes newly awakened to the immensity of his loss, bowed his face in his hands and wept like a heart-broken child over the falling of his house of cards.

Ah! his mother had understood—she had loved and suffered. She was older than he, too, and

had known her world as he could not possibly know it, and yet she had bade him take the gifts of life when they came his way.

And—God help him!—he had not done so!

CHAPTER XXI

THE next morning, Paul Zalenska rose early. He had not slept well. He was troubled with conflicting emotions, conflicting memories. The wonder and sorrow of it all had been too much even for his youth and health to endure. His mother had won so much from life, he thought—and he so little! He thought of Opal—indeed, when was she ever absent from his thoughts, waking or sleeping?—and the memory of his loss made him frantic. Opal—his darling! And *they* might have been just as happy as his mother and father had been, but they had let their happiness slip from them! What fools! Oh, what fools they had been! Not to have risked anything—everything—for their happiness! And where was she now? In Paris, in her husband's arms, no doubt, where he could hold her to him, and caress her and kiss her at his own sweet will!

God! It was intolerable, unthinkable! And he—Paul, her lover—lying there alone, who would have died a thousand deaths, if that were possible, to save her from such a fate!

At last he forced the thought of his own loss from him, and thought again of his mother. Ah, but her death had been opportune! How glorious to die when life and love had reached their zenith! in the fullness of joy to take one's farewell of the world!

And in the long watches of that wakeful night, he formed the resolution that he put into effect at the first hint of dawn. He would spend one entire day in solitude. He would traverse step by step the primrose paths of his mother's idyllic dream; he would visit every scene, every nook, she and her lover had immortalized in their memories; he would see it all, feel it all—yes, *live* it all, and become so impregnated with its witchery that it would shed lustre and glory upon all the bleak years to come. So well had she told her story, so perfect had been its word-painting, he was sure that he would recognize every scene.

He explored the ivy-terrace leading to his

mother's room, he walked up and down under the lime trees, and he sat on the bench still in position under the ivy hanging from the balustrade, and looked up wistfully at the windows of the rooms that had been hers. Then he engaged a launch and crossed the lake, and was not satisfied until he had found among the young beeches on the other side what he felt must have been the exact spot where his mother had peeped through the leaves upon her ardent lover, before she knew him. And he roamed about among the trees, feeling a subtle sense of satisfaction in being in the same places that they had been who gave him being, as though the spirits of their two natures must still haunt the spot and leave some trace of their presence even yet. He followed each of the three paths until he had decided to his own satisfaction by which one his mother had escaped from her pursuer, that day, and he laughed a buoyant, boyish laugh at the image it suggested of Verdayne, the misogynist—his stately, staid old Father Paul—actually "running after a woman!"

Truly the Boy was putting aside his own sorrow and discontent to-day. He was living in

the past, identifying himself with every phase of it, living in imagination the life of these two so dear to him, and rejoicing in their joy. Life had certainly been one sweet song to them, for a brief space, a duet in Paradise, broken up—alas for the Boy!—before it had become the trio it should have developed into, by every law of Nature.

He sought the little village that they had visited before him, and lunched at the same little hotel. He drove out to the little farmhouse where the lovers had had their first revelation of him—their baby—and he wept over the loss of the glorious mother she would have been to him. He even climbed the mountain and looked with her eyes out over the landscape. He was young and strong, and he determined to let nothing escape him—to let no sense of fatigue deter him—but to crowd the day full of memories of her.

The Boy, as his mother had been before him, was enraptured by all that he saw. The beauty of the snow-capped mountains against the blue of the sky and the golden glamour of the sunshine appealed to him keenly, and he watched the re-

flection of it all in the crystal lake in a trance of delight.

"Ah," he thought, "had they deliberately searched the world over for a fitting setting for their idyl, they could not have selected a retreat more perfect than this. It was made for lovers who love as they did."

And at last, under the witchery of the star-studded skies, wearied and hungry, but filled and thrilled with the fragrance and glory of the memories of the mother whom his young heart idealized, he left the launch at the landing by the terrace steps and started blithely for the little restaurant, dreaming, always dreaming, not of the future—but of the past.

For him, alas, the future held no promise!

CHAPTER XXII

DURING the Boy's absence that day a new guest had arrived at the little hotel. A capricious American lady, who had come to Lucerne, "for a day or two's rest," she said, before proceeding to Paris where an impatient Count awaited her and his wedding-day.

Yes, Opal was actually in Lucerne, and the suite of rooms once occupied by the mysterious Madame Zalenska were now given over to the little lady from over the seas, who, in spite of her diminutive stature, contrived to impress everybody with a sense of her own importance. She had just received a letter from her fiancé, an unusually impatient communication, even from him. He was anxious, he said, for her and his long-delayed honeymoon. Honeymoon! God help her! Her soul recoiled in horror from the hideous prospect. Only two days more, she

thought, pressing her lips tightly together. Oh, the horror of it! She dared not think of it, or she would go mad! But she would not falter. She had told herself that she was now resigned. She was going to defeat Fate after all!

She had partaken of her dinner, and was standing behind the ivy that draped the little balcony, watching the moon in its setting of Swiss skies and mystic landscape. How white and calm and spotless it appeared! It was not a man's face she saw there—but that of a woman—the face of a nun in its saintly, virgin purity, suggesting only sweet inspiring thoughts of the glory of fidelity to duty, of the comfort and peace and rest that come of renunciation.

Opal clasped her hands together with a thrill of exultation at her own victory over the love and longings that were never to be fulfilled. A song of prayer and thanksgiving echoed in her heart over the thought that she had been strong enough to do her duty and bear the cross that life had so early laid upon her shoulders. She felt so good—so true—so pure—so strong to-night. She would make her life, she thought—

her life that could know no personal love—abound in love for all the world, and be to all it touched a living, breathing benediction.

As she gazed she suddenly noticed a lighted launch on the little lake, and an inexplicable prescience disturbed the calm of her musings. She watched, with an intensity she could not have explained, the gradual approach of the little craft. What did that boat, or its passenger, matter to her that she should feel such an acute interest in its movements? Yet something told her it did matter much, and though she laughed at her superstition, nevertheless her heart listened to it, and dared not gainsay its insistent whisper.

A young man, straight and tall and lithe, bounded from the launch and mounted the terrace steps. She saw his clean-cut profile, his well-groomed appearance, which even in the moonlight was plainly evident. She noted the regal bearing of his well-knit figure, and she caught the delicious aroma of the particular brand of cigar Paul always smoked, as he passed beneath the balcony where she stood.

She turned in very terror and fled to her rooms, pulling the curtains closer. She shrank like a frightened child upon the couch, her face white and drawn with fear—of what, she did not know.

After a time—long, terrible hours, it seemed to her—she parted the curtains with tremulous fingers and looked out again at the sky, and shuddered. The virgin nun-face had mysteriously changed—the moon that had looked so pure and spotless was now blood-red with passion.

Opal crept back, pulling the curtains together again, and threw herself face downward upon the couch. God help her!

Paul Zalenska lingered long over his dinner that night. He was tired and thoughtful. And he enjoyed sitting at that little table where his father perhaps sat the night he had first seen her who became his love.

And Paul pictured to himself that first meeting. He tried to imagine that he was Paul Verdayne, and that shortly his lady would come in with her stately tread, and take her seat, and be waited upon by her elderly attendant. Perhaps she would look at him through those long dark lashes with eyes that seemed not to see. But there was no special table, to-night, and the Boy felt that the picture was woefully incomplete—that he had been left out of the scheme of things entirely.

After finishing his meal, he went out, as his father had done, out under the stars and sat on the little bench under the ivy, and smoked a cigar. He felt a curious thrill of excitement, quite out of keeping with his loneliness. Was it just the memory of that old love-story that had stirred his blood? Why did his pulse leap, his blood race through his veins like this, his heart rise to his throat and hammer there so fiercely, so strangely. Only one influence in all the world had ever done this to him—only one influence—*one woman*—and she was miles and miles away!

Suddenly, impelled by some force beyond his power of resistance—a sense of someone's gaze fixed upon him, he raised his eyes to the ivy above him. There, faint and indistinct in the shadow of the leaves, but quite unmistakable, he saw the white, frightened face of the girl he loved, her luminous eyes looking straight down into his.

He sprang to his feet, and pulled himself up by the ivy to the level of the terrace, but she had vanished and the watching stars danced mockingly overhead. Was he dreaming? Had that strange old love-story taken away from him the last remaining shred of sanity? Surely he hadn't seen Opal! She was in Paris—damn it!—and he clenched his teeth at the thought—certainly not at Lucerne!

He looked at the windows of that enchanted room. All was darkness and silence. Cursing himself for a madman, he strode into the hall and examined the Visitors' List. Suddenly the blood leaped to his face—his head reeled—his heart beat to suffocation. He was *not* dream-

ing, for there, as plainly as words could be written, was the entry:

Miss Ledoux and maid, New Orleans, U. S. A.

She was there—in Lucerne!—his Opal!

CHAPTER XXIII

How Paul reached his room, he never knew. He was in an ecstasy—his young blood surging through his veins in response to the leap of the seething passions within.

Have you never felt it, Reader? If you have not, you had better lay aside this book, for you will never, never understand what followed—what *must* follow, in the very nature of human hearts.

Fate once more had placed happiness in his grasp—should he fling it from him? Never! never again! He remembered his mother and her great love, as she had bade him.

This day, following as it did his mother's letter, had been a revelation to him of the possibilities of life, and of his own capacity for enjoying it. In one week, only one week more, he

must take upon his shoulders the burdens of a kingdom. Should he let a mistaken sense of right and duty defraud him a second time? Was this barrier—which a stronger or a weaker man would have brushed aside without a second thought—to wreck his life, and Opal's? He laughed exultingly. His whole soul was on fire, his whole body aflame.

Beyond the formality of the betrothal, Opal had not yet been bound to the Count. She was not his—yet! She could not be Paul's wife—Fate had made that forever impossible—but she should be *his,* as he knew she already was at heart.

They loved, and was not love—everything!

He paced the floor in an excitement beyond his control. Opal should give him, out of her life, one day—one day in the little hotel on the Bürgenstock, where his mother and her lover had been so happy. They, too, should be happy—as happy as two mating birds in a new-built nest—for one day they would forget all yesterdays and all to-morrows. He would make that one day as glorious and shadowless for her as a

day could possibly be made—one day in which to forget that the world was gray—one day which should live in their memories throughout all the years to come as the one ray of sunshine in two bleak and dreary lives!

And tempted, as he admitted to himself, quite beyond all reason, he swore by all that he held sacred to risk everything—brave everything—for the sake of living one day in Paradise.

"We have a right to be happy," he said. "Everyone has a right to be happy, and we have done no wrong to the world. Why should we two, who have the capability of making so much of our lives and doing so much for the world, as we might have, together—why should we be sentenced to the misery of mere existence, while men and women far less worthy of happiness enjoy life in its utmost ecstasy?"

One thing he was firmly resolved upon. Opal should not know his real rank. She should give herself to Paul Zalenska, the man—not to Paul the Prince! His rank should gloss over nothing—nothing—and for all she knew now to the con-

trary, her future rank as Countess de Roannes was superior to his own.

And then as silence fell about the little hotel, unbroken save by some strolling musicians in the square near at hand who sent the most tender of Swiss love-melodies out upon the evening air, Paul walked out to the terrace, passed through the little gate, and reaching the balcony, knocked gently but imperatively upon the door of the room that was once his mother's.

The door was opened cautiously.

Paul stepped inside, and closed it softly behind him.

CHAPTER XXIV

In the moonlit room, Paul and Opal faced each other in a silence heavy with emotion.

It had been months since they parted, yet for some moments neither spoke. Opal first found her voice.

"Paul! You—saw me!"

"I felt your eyes!"

"Oh, why did I come!"

Opal had begun to prepare for the night and had thrown about her shoulders a loose robe of crimson silk. Her lustrous hair, like waves of burnished copper, hung below her waist in beautiful confusion. With trembling fingers she attempted to secure it.

"Your hair is wonderful, Opal! Please leave it as it is," Paul said softly. And, curiously enough, she obeyed in silence.

"Paul," she said at last, with a little nervous laugh, as she recovered her self-possession and seated herself on the couch, "don't stand staring at me! I'm not a tragedy queen! You're too melodramatic. Sit down and tell me why you've come here at this hour."

Paul obeyed mechanically, his gaze still upon her. She shrank from the expression of his eyes —it was the old tiger-look again!

"I came because I had to, Opal. I could not have done otherwise. I have something to tell you."

"Something to tell me?" she repeated.

"Yes. The most interesting story in the world to me, Opal—a letter from my mother—a letter to me alone, which I can share with only one woman in the world—the woman I love!"

Her eyes fell. As she raised her hand abstractedly to adjust the curtain, Paul saw the flash of her betrothal ring. He caught her hand in his and quietly slipped the ring from her finger. She seized the jewel with her free hand and tried to thrust it into her bosom.

"No! no!—not there!" he remonstrated, and

was not satisfied until she had crossed the room and hidden it from his sight.

"Does that please your majesty?" she asked, with a curious little tremble in her voice.

Paul started, and stared at her with a world of wonder in his eyes. Could she know?

"Your majesty——" he stammered.

"Why not?" she laughed. "You speak as though you had but to command to be obeyed."

"Forgive me, dear," he answered softly.

And Opal became her sympathetic self again.

"Tell me about your mother, Paul," she said.

And Paul, beginning at the very beginning, told her the whole story as it had been told to him, reading much of his mother's letter to her, reserving only such portions of it as would reveal the identity he was determined to keep secret until she was his. The girl was moved to the depths of her nature by the beauty and pathos of it all, and then the thought came to her, "This, then, is Paul's heritage—his birthright! He, like me, is doomed!"

And her heart ached for him—and for herself!

But Paul did not give her long to muse. Sit-

ting down beside her for the first time, he told her the plan he had been turning over in his mind for their one day together.

"Surely," he said, "it is not too much to ask out of a lifetime of misery—one little day of bliss! Just one day in which there shall be no yesterday, and no to-morrow—one day of Elysium against years of Purgatory! Let us have our idyl, dear, as my mother and father had theirs—even though it must be as brief as a butterfly's existence, let us not deny ourselves that much. I ask only one day!

"You love me, Opal. I love you. You are, of all the world of women, my chosen one, as I—no, don't shake your head, for you can't honestly deny it—am yours! We know we must soon part forever. Won't it be easier for both of us—both, I say—if for but one day, we can give to each other all! Won't all our lives be better for the memory of one perfect day? Think, Opal—to take out of all eternity just a few hours—and yet out of those few hours may be born sufficient courage for all the life to come! Don't you see? Can't you? Oh, I can't argue—I

can't reason! I only want you to be mine—all mine—yes, if only for a few hours—all mine!"

"Paul, you are mad," she began, but he would not listen.

"Just one day," he pleaded—"no yesterday, and no to-morrow!"

He looked at her tenderly.

"Opal, it simply has to be—it's Fate! If it wasn't meant to be, why have we met here like this? Do you think we two are mere toys in the grip of circumstances? Or do you believe the gods have crossed our paths again just to tantalize us? Is that why we are here, Opal, you and I—*together?*"

"Why, I came to rest—to see Lucerne! Most tourists come to Lucerne! It's a—pretty—place—very!" she responded, lamely.

"Well, then, account for the rest of it. Why did *I* come?—and at the same time?—and find you here in my mother's room? Simply a coincidence? Answer me that! Chance plays strange freaks sometimes, I'll admit, but Fate is a little more than mere chance. Why did I hear your voice, that time? Why did I see you, and

follow? Why did we find ourselves so near akin —so strangely, so irresistibly drawn to each other? Answer me, Opal! Why was it, if we weren't created to be—*one?*"

After a moment of waiting he said, "Listen to the music, Opal! Only listen! Doesn't it remind you of dreams and visions—of fairyland, of happiness, and—love?"

But she could not answer.

At last she said slowly, "Oh, it's too late, Paul —too late!"

"Too late?" he echoed. "It's never too late to take the good the gods send! Never, while love lasts!"

"But the Count, Paul—and your fiancée! Think, Paul, think!"

"I can't think! What does the Count matter, Opal! Nothing—nothing makes any difference when you are face to face with destiny and your soul-mate calls! It has to be—*it has to be!*—can't you—won't you—see it?"

"God help all poor souls lost in the dark!" She did see it. It stared her relentlessly in the face and tugged mercilessly at her heart

with fingers of red-hot steel! She covered her face with her hands, but she could not shut out the terrible image of advancing Death that held for her all the charm of a serpent's eye. She struggled, as virgin woman has always struggled. But in her heart she knew that she would yield. What was her weak woman's nature after all, when pitted against the strength of the man she loved!

"Oh, I was feeling so pure—so good—so true—to-night! Are there not thousands of beautiful women in the world who might be yours for the asking? Could you not let the poor Count have his wife and his honeymoon in peace?"

Honeymoon! She shuddered at the thought.

"Sweetheart," he whispered, "by every God-made law of Nature you are mine—mine—mine! What care we for the foolish, man-made conventions of this or any other land? There is only one law in the universe—the divine right of the individual to choose for himself his mate!"

Then his whisper became softer—more enticing—more resistless in its passionate appeal.

He was pleading with his whole soul—this

prince who with one word could command the unquestioning obedience of a kingdom! But the woman in his arms did not know that, and it would have made no difference if she had. In that supreme moment it was only man and woman.

Opal gazed in amazement at this revelation of a new Paul. How splendid he was! What a king among all the men she knew! What a god in his manhood's glory!—a god to make the hearts of better and wiser women than she ache —and break—with longing! Her hand stole to her heart to still the fury of its beating.

"Opal," he breathed, "I have wanted you ever since that mad moment in gray old London when I first caught the lure in your glorious eyes—do you remember, sweetheart? I know you are mine—and you know it—girl!

His voice sank lower and lower, growing more and more intense with suppressed passion. Opal was held spellbound by the subtle charm of his languorous eyes. She wanted to cry out, but she could not speak—she could not think—the spell of his fascination overpowered her.

She felt her eyes grow humid. Her heart seemed to struggle upward, till it caught in her throat like a huge lump of molten lead and threatened to choke her with its wild, hot pulsations.

"I love you, Opal! I love you! and I want you! God! how I want you!" Paul stammered on, with a catch in his boyish voice it made her heart leap to hear. "I want your eyes, Opal—your hair—your lips—your glorious self! I want you as man never wanted woman before!"

He paused, dazed by his own passion, maddened by her lack of response—blinded by a mist of fire that made his senses swim and his brain reel, and crazed by the throbbing of the pulse that cried out from every vein in his body with the world-old elemental call. Was she going to close the gates of Paradise in his very face and in the very hour of his triumph rob him of the one day—his little day?

It was too much.

More overwhelmed by her lack of response than by any words she could have uttered, Paul hesi-

tated. Then, speech failing him, half-dazed, he stumbled toward the door.

"Paul! . . . Paul!"

He heard her call as one in dreamland catches the far-off summons of earth's realities. He turned. She stretched out her arms to him—those round, white arms.

"I understand you, Paul! I do understand." She threw her arms around his neck and drew his face down to hers. "Yes, I love you, Paul, I love you! Do you hear, I love you! I am yours—utterly—heart, mind, soul, and body! Don't you know that I am yours?"

She was in his arms now, weeping strange, hot tears of joy, her heart throbbing fiercely against his own.

"Paul—Paul—I am mad, I think!—we are both mad, you and I!"

And as their lips at last met in one long, soul-maddening kiss, and the intoxication of the senses stole over them, she murmured in the fullness of her surrender, "Take me! Crush me! Kiss me! My love—my love!"

* * * *

CHAPTER XXV

THE morning dawned. The morning of their one day.

Nature had done her best for them and made it all that a May day should be. There was not one tint, nor tone, nor bit of fragrance lacking. Silver-throated birds flooded the world with songs of love. The very air seemed full of beauty and passion and the glory and joy of life in the dawn of its fullness.

Their arrangements had been hasty, but complete. Paul had stolen away from Lucerne in the middle of the night, to be ready to welcome his darling at the first break of the morning; and it was at a delightfully early hour that they met at the little hotel on the Bürgenstock where his mother's love-dream had waxed to its idyllic perfection, one-and-twenty years ago. They sat on the balcony and ate their simple breakfast, looking down to where the reflection of the

snow-crowned mountains trembled in the limpid lake.

Opal had never before looked so lovely, he thought. She was gowned in the simplest fashion in purest white, as a bride should be, her glorious hair arranged in a loose, girlish knot, while her lustrous eyes were cast down, shyly, and her cheeks were flushed—flushed with the revelations and memories of the night just passed—flushed with the promise of the day just dawning—flushed with love, with slumbering, smouldering passion—with wifehood!

How completely she was his when she had once surrendered!

In their first kiss of greeting, they bridged over, in one ecstatic moment, the hours of their brief separation. When he finally withdrew his lips from hers, with a deep sigh of momentary satisfaction, she looked up into his eyes with something of the old, capricious mischief dancing in her own.

"Let us make the most of our day, darling, our one day!" she said. "We must not waste a single minute of it."

Opal had stolen away from Lucerne and had come up the mountain absolutely unattended. She would share her secret with no one, she said, and Paul had acquiesced. And now he took her up in his arms as one would carry a little child, and bore her off to the suite he had engaged for them. What a bit of a thing she was to wield such an influence over a man's whole life!

A pert little French maid waited upon them. She eyed with great favor the *distingué* young monsieur, and his *charmante épouse!* There was a knowing twinkle in her eye—she had not been a *femme de chambre* even a little while without learning to scent a *lune de miel!* And this promised to be especially *piquante.* But Paul would have none of her, and she tripped away disappointed of her coveted *divertissement.*

Paul was very jealous and exacting and even domineering this morning, and would permit no intrusion. He would take care of madame, he had informed the girl, and when she had taken herself away, he repeated it emphatically. Opal was his little girl, he said, and he was going to

pet and coddle her himself. *Femme de chambre* indeed! Wasn't he worth a dozen of the impertinent French minxes! Wanted to coquette with him, most likely—thought he might be ready to yawn over madame's charms! She could keep her pretty ankles out of his sight—he wasn't interested in them!

How Paul thrilled at the touch of everything Opal wore! Soft delicious things they were, and he handled them with an awkward reverence that brought tears to her eyes. They spoke a strange, shy language of their own—these little, filmy bits of fine linen.

Oh, but it was good, thought Opal, to be taken care of like this!—to be on these familiar terms with the Boy she loved—to give him the right to love her and do these little things, so sacred in a woman's life. And to Paul it meant more than even she guessed. It was such a new world to him. He felt that he was treading on holy ground, and, for the moment, was half-afraid.

And thus began their one day—the one day

that was to know no yesterday, and no to-morrow!

They found it hard to remember that part of it at all times. He would grow reminiscent for an instant, and begin, "Do you remember——" and she would catch him up quickly with a whispered, "No yesterday, Paul!" And again, it would be his turn, for a troubled look would cloud the joy of her eyes, and she would start to say, "What shall I do——" or "When I go to Paris——" and Paul would snatch her to his heart and remind her that there was "No to-morrow!"

All the forenoon she lay in his arms, crying out with little inarticulate gurgles of joy under his caresses, lavishing a whole lifetime's concentrated emotion upon him in a ferocity of passion that seemed quenchless.

And Paul was in the seventh heaven—mad with love! He was learning that there were tones in that glorious voice that he had never heard before, depths in those eyes that he had never fathomed—and those tones, those depths, were all for him, for him alone—aye, had been

waiting there through all eternity for his awakening touch.

"Opal," he said, earnestly, "perhaps it was here—on this very spot, it may be, who knows—that my mother gave herself to my father!

But she could only smile at him through fast-gathering tears—strange tears of mingled joy and wonder and pain.

And he covered her face, her neck, her shoulders with burning kisses, and cried out in an ecstasy of bliss, "Oh, my love! My life!"

And thus the morning hours died away.

CHAPTER XXVI

AND behold, it was noon!

The day and their love stood still together. The glamour of the day, the resistless force of their masterful love that seemed to them so unlike all other loves of which they had ever heard or dreamed, held them in a transport of delight that could only manifest itself in strange, bitter-sweet caresses, in incoherent murmurings.

This, then, was love! Aye, this was Love!

The thoughts of the two returned with a tender, persistent recollection to the love-tale of the past—the delicious idyl of love that had given birth to this boy. Here, even here, had been spent those three maddest and gladdest of weeks—that dream of an ideal love realized in its fullness, as it is given to few to realize.

Yes, that was Love!

It was youth eternal—youth and fire, power and passion.

It was May! May!

It was mid-afternoon before they awakened, to look into each other's eyes with a new understanding. Surely never since the world began had two souls loved each other as did these!

And what should they do with the afternoon? Such a little while remained for them—such a little while!

Paul drew out his mother's letter, and together they read it, understanding now, as they had not been able to understand before, its whole wonderful significance.

When they read of the first dawn of the hope of parentage in the hearts of these long-ago lovers, their eyes met, heavy with the wistfulness of renunciation. That consolation, alas! was not for them. Only the joy of loving could ever be theirs.

And then, drawing out the other letters that

had accompanied his mother's, Paul revealed to his darling the whole mystery of his identity.

At first she was startled—almost appalled—at the thought that she had given herself to a Prince of the Purple—a real king of a real kingdom—and for a moment felt a strange awe of him.

But Paul, reading her unspoken thought in her eyes, with that sweet clairvoyance that had always existed between them, soothed and petted and caressed her till the smiles returned to her face and she nestled in his arms, once more happy and content.

She was the queen of his soul, he told her, whoever might wear the crown and bear the title before the world. Then, very carefully, lest he should wound her, he told her the whole story of the Princess Elodie.

Opal moved across the room and stood drumming idly by the long, open window. He watched her anxiously.

"Paul, did you go to see her as you promised—and is she . . . pretty?"

"She is a cow!"

"Paul!" Opal laughed at his tone.

"Oh, but she is! Fancy loving a cow!"

Opal's heart grew heavy with a great pity for this poor, unfortunate royal lady who was to be Paul's wife—the mother of his children—but never, never his Love!

"But, Paul, you'll be good to her, won't you? I know you will! You couldn't be unkind to any living thing."

And she ran into his arms, and clasped his neck tight! And the poor Princess Elodie was again forgotten!

"You—Opal—are my real wife," Paul assured her, "the one love of my soul, the mate the gods have formed for me—my own forever!"

Opal wept for pity of him, and for herself, but she faced the future bravely. She would always be his guiding star, to beckon him upward!

"And, Opal, my darling," Paul went on, "I promise you to live henceforth a life of which you shall be proud. I will be brave and true and noble and great and pure—to prove my gratitude to the gods for giving me this one day—for giving me you, dearest—and your love—your wonderful love! I *will* be worthy, dear—I will! I'll be your

knight—your Launcelot—and you shall be my Guenevere! I will always wear your colors in my heart, dear—the red-brown of your hair, the glorious hazel of your eyes, the flush of your soft cheek, the rose of your sweet lips, the virgin whiteness of your soul!"

Opal looked at him with eyes brimming with pride. Young as he was, he was indeed every inch a king.

And she had crowned him king of her heart and soul and life before she had known! Oh, the wonder of it!—the strange, sweet wonder of it! *He,* who might have loved and mated where he would, had chosen her to be his love! She could not realize it. It was almost beyond belief, she thought, that she—plain little Opal Ledoux—could stir such a nature as his to such a depth as she knew she had stirred it.

Ah, the gods had been good to her! They had sent her the Prince Charming, and he had wakened her with his kiss—that first kiss—how well she remembered it—and how utterly she belonged to him!

Then she remembered that, however much they

tried to deceive themselves, there *was* a to-morrow—a to-morrow that would surely come—a to-morrow in which they would not belong to each other at all. He would belong to the world. She would belong to a——

She sprang up at the recollection, and drew the curtains of the window closer together.

"We will shut out the cold, inquisitive, prying old world," she said. "It shall not look, shall not listen! It is a hard, cruel world, my Paul. It would say that I must not put my arms around your neck—like this—must not lay my cheek against yours—so—must not let my heart feel the wild throbbing of yours—and why? Because I do not wear your ring, Paul—that's all!"

She held up her white hand for his inspection, and surveyed it critically.

"See, Paul—there is no glittering, golden fetter to hold me to you with the power of an iron band, and so I must not—let you hold me to you at all!"

They both laughed merrily, and then Paul, pulling her down on his knee and holding her face against his own, whispered, "What care we for the old world? It is as sad and mad and bad as we

are—if we only knew! And who knows how much worse? It has petty bickerings, damning lies of spite and malice, trickery and thievery and corruption on its conscience. Let the little people of the world prate of their little things! We are free, dearest—and we defy it, don't we? Our ideals are never lost. And ideals are the life of love. Is love—a love like ours—a murderer of life?"

"Sometimes, Paul—sometimes! I fear it—I do fear it!"

"Never fear, Opal, my beloved! You need not fear anything—anywhere! I will stand between you and the world, dear—between you and hell itself! My God, girl, how I love you! Opal! My Opal! My heart aches with the immensity of it! Come, my love, my queen, my treasure, come! We have not many more hours to—live! And I want you close, close—all mine! Ah, Opal, we are masters of life and death! All earth, all heaven, and—hell itself, cannot take you from me now!"

Oh, if some moments in life could only be eternal!

CHAPTER XXVII

AND the day—died!

The sun sank beneath the western horizon; the moon cast her silvery sheen over the weary world; the twinkling stars appeared in the jewelled diadem of night; and the silence of evening settled over mountain and lake and swaying tree, while the two who had dared all things for the sake of this one day, looked into each other's eyes now with a sudden realization of the end.

They had not allowed themselves once to think of the hour of separation.

And now it was upon them! And they were not ready to part.

"How do people say good-by forever, Paul?—people who love as we love? How do they say it, dear? Tell me!"

"But it is not forever, Opal. Don't you know

that you will always be part of my life—my soul-life, which is the only true one—its sanctifying inspiration? You must not forget that—never, never!"

"No, I won't forget it, my King!" She delighted in giving him his title now. "That satisfaction I will hold to as long as I live!"

"But, Opal, am I never to see you?—never? Surely we may meet sometimes—rarely, of course, at long intervals, when life grows gray and gloomy, and I am starving for one ray of the sunshine of your smile?"

"It would be dangerous, Paul, for both of us!"

"But the world is only a little place after all, beloved. We shall be thrown together again by Fate—as we have been this time."

Then she smiled at him archly. "Ah, Paul, I know you so well! Your eyes are saying that you will often manage to see me 'by chance'—but you must not, dear, you must not."

"Girl, I can never forget one word you have uttered, one caress you have given—one tone of your voice—one smile of your lips—one glance of your eye—never, never in God's world!"

"Hold me closer, Paul, and teach me to be brave!"

They clung together in an agony too poignant for words, too mighty for tears! And of the unutterable madness and anguish of those last bitter kisses of farewell, no mortal pen can write!

But theirs had been from the beginning a mad love—a mad, hopeless, fatal love—and it could bring neither of them happiness nor peace—nothing but the bitterness of eternal regret!

And thus the day—their one day of life—came to an end!

That evening, from the hotel at Lucerne, two telegrams flashed over the wires. One was addressed to the Count de Roannes, Paris, and read as follows:

"Shall reach Paris Monday afternoon.—Opal."

The other was addressed to Sir Paul Verdayne,

at Venice, and was not signed at all, saying simply,

"A son awaits his father in Lucerne."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THAT night a sudden storm swept across Lucerne.

The thunder crashed like the boom of a thousand cannon; like menacing blades the lightning flashed its tongues of savage flame; the winds raved in relentless fury, rocking the giant trees like straws in the majesty of their wrath. Madness reigned in undisputed sovereignty, and the earth cowered and trembled beneath the anger of the threatening heavens.

Opal crouched in her bed, and buried her head in the pillows. She had never before known the meaning of fear, but now she was alone, and the consciousness of guilt was upon her—the acute agony of their separation mingled with the despairing prospect of a long, miserable loveless—yes, *shameful*—life as the legal slave of a man she abhorred.

She did not regret the one day she had given to her lover. Whatever the cost, she would never, never regret, she said to herself, for it had been well worth any price that might be required of her. She gloried in it, even now, while the storm raged outside.

And the thunders crashed like the falling of mighty rocks upon the roof over her head. Should she summon Céleste, her maid?

Suddenly, as the tempest paused as if to catch its breath, she heard footsteps in the corridor outside. It was very late—who could be prowling about at this hour? She listened intently, every nerve and sense keenly alert. Nearer and nearer the steps came, and then she remembered with a start that in the excitement of her stealthy return to the hotel and the anguish and madness of their parting, she had forgotten to fasten her door.

There came a light tap on the panel. She did not speak or move—hardly breathed. Then the door opened, noiselessly, cautiously, and he—her lover, her king—entered, the dim light of her room making his form, as it approached, appear

of even more than its usual majestic height and power.

"Paul!" she whispered.

He seemed in a strange daze. Had the storm gone to his head and driven him mad?

"Yes, it is I," he said hoarsely. "It is Paul. Don't cry out. See, I am calm!" and he laid his hand on hers. It was burning with fever. "I will not hurt you, Opal!"

Cry out? Hurt her? What did he mean? She had no thought of crying out. Of course he would not hurt her—her lover, her lord, her king! Did she not belong to him—now?

He sat down and took her hands in his.

"Opal," he muttered, "I've been thinking, thinking, thinking, till I feel half-mad—yes, mad! Dearest, I cannot give you up like this—I cannot! Let you go to *his* arms—you who have been mine! Oh, Opal, I've pictured it all to myself—seen you in his arms—seen his lips on yours—seen—seen—Can't you imagine what it means to me? It's more than I can stand, dearest! I may be crazy—I believe I am—but wouldn't it be better for you

and me to—to—cease forever this mockery of life, and—forget?"

She did not understand him.

"Forget?" she murmured, holding his hand against her cheek, while her free arm pulled his head down to hers. "Forget?"

He pressed his burning lips to her cool neck, and then, after a moment, went on, "Yes, beloved, to forget. Think, Opal, think! To forget all ambition, all restlessness, all disappointment, all longing for what can never be, all pain, all suffering, all thought of responsibility or growth or desire, all success or failure—all life, all death—to forget! to forget! Ah, dearest, one must have loved as we have loved, and lost as we have lost, to wish to—forget!"

"But there is no such respite for us, Paul. We are not the sort who can put memory aside. To live will be to remember!"

"Yes, that is it. To live *is* to remember. But why should we live longer? We've lived a lifetime in one day, have we not, sweetheart? What more has life to give us?"

He was calmer now, but it was the calmness of determination.

"Let us die, dear—let us die! Virginius slew his daughter to save her honor. You are more to me than a thousand daughters. You are my wife, Opal!—Opal, my very own!"

His eyes softened again, as the storm outside lulled for a moment.

"My darling, don't be afraid! I will save you from him. I will keep you mine—mine!"

The thunder crashed again, and again the fury leaped to his eyes. He drew from his pocket a curious foreign dagger, engraved with quaint designs, and glittering with encrusted gold. Opal recognized it at once. She had toyed with it the day before, admiring the richness of its material and workmanship.

"She—has been—mine—my wife," he muttered to himself, wildly, disconnectedly, yet with startling distinctness. "She shall never, never lie in his arms!"

He passed his hand across his eyes, as if to brush away a veil.

"Oh, the red! the red! the red! It's blood and

fire and hell! It glares in my eyes! It screams in my ears! Bidding me kill! kill!"

He clasped her to him fiercely.

"To see you, after all this—to see you go from me—and know you were going to him—*him*—while I went . . . Oh, beloved! beloved! God never meant that! Surely He never meant that when He created us the creatures that we are!"

She kissed his hot, quivering lips. She had not loved him so much in all their one mad day as she loved him now.

"Paul," she whispered, "beloved!—what would you do?"

There was only a great wonder in her eyes, not the faintest sign of fear. Even in his anguish the Boy noticed that.

"What would I do? Listen, Opal, my darling. Don't you remember, you said it was not life but death—and I said it was both! And it is! it is! I thought I was strong enough to brave hell! Opal—though you are betrothed to the Count de Roannes you are *my wife!* And our wedding-journey shall be eternal—through stars, Opal, and worlds—far-off, glimmering worlds—our

freed spirits together, always together—together!"

She watched him, fascinated, spell-bound.

"Dear heart, Nature will not repulse us," Paul continued. "She will gather us to her great, warm, peaceful heart, beloved!"

Opal held him close to her breast, almost maternally, with a great longing to soothe and calm his troubled spirit.

"Think," he continued, "of what my poor, unhappy mother said was the cost of love—*'Sorrow and death!'* We have had the sorrow, God knows! And now for death! Kiss me, dearest, dearest! Kiss me for time and for eternity, Opal, for in life and in death we can never part more!"

She kissed him—obediently, solemnly—and then, holding her to him, drinking in all the love that still shone for him in those eyes that had driven him to desperation, he suddenly plunged the little dagger to its hilt through her heart.

She did not cry out. She did not even shudder. But looking at him with "the light that never was on sea or land" in her still brilliant eyes, she

murmured, "In—life—and—in—death . . . beloved! beloved!"

And while he whispered between his set lips, "Sleep, my beloved, sleep," her little head dropped back against his arm with a long, peaceful sigh.

He held her form tenderly to his heart, murmuring senseless, meaningless words of comfort and love, like a mother crooning her babe to sleep. And he still clasped her there till the new day peeped through the blinds. And the storm raged at intervals with all the ferocity of unspent passion. But *his* passion was over now, and he laughed a savage laugh of triumph.

No one could take her from him now—no one! His darling was his—his wife—in life and in death!

He laid her down upon the bed and arranged the blankets over her tenderly, hiding the hideous, gaping wound, with its unceasing flow, carefully from sight. He closed her eyes, kissing them as he did so, and folded her little white hands together, and then he pulled out the disarranged lace at her throat and smoothed it mechanically, till it lay quite to his satisfaction. Opal was

so fastidious, he thought—so particular about these little niceties of dress. She would like to look well when they found her—dear Heaven! —to-morrow!

"No to-morrow!" he thought. They had spoken more wisely than they knew. There would be no to-morrow for her—nor for him!

There was a tiny spot of blood upon the frill of her sleeve, and he carefully turned it under, out of sight. He looked at the ugly stains upon his own garments with a thrill of satisfaction. She was his! Was it not quite right and proper that her blood should be upon him?

But even then, frenzied as he was, he had a singular care for appearances, a curious regard for detail, and busied himself in removing all signs of his presence from her chamber—all tell-tale traces of the storm of passion that swept away her life—and his! He felt himself already but the ghost of his former self, and laughed a weird, half-mad laugh at the thought as it came to him.

He bent over her again. He would have given much to have lain down beside her and slept his

last sleep in her cold, lifeless arms. But no! Even this was denied him!

He wound a tress of her hair about his fingers, and it clung and twined there as her white fingers had been wont to twine. Oh, the pity of her stillness—her silence—who was never still nor silent —never indifferent to his presence! She looked so like a sleeping child in her whiteness and tranquillity, her red-brown hair in disordered waves about her head, her eyes closed in the last long sleep. And he wept as he pressed his burning lips to hers, so cold, so pitifully cold, and for the first time unresponsive. Oh, God, unresponsive forever!

"Poor little girl!" he moaned, between sobs of hopeless pain. "Poor little passionate girl! . . . Poor little tired Opal!"

And with a dry sob of unutterable anguish, he picked up the dagger—the cruel, kind little dagger—and crept to his own room.

The dagger was still wet with her blood. "Her blood!—Oh, God!—her blood!—hers! All mine in life, and yet never so much mine as now—mine in death!—all mine! mine! And she was not

afraid—not the least afraid! Her eyes had room only for her overwhelming love—love—just love, no fear, even that hour when face to face with the Great Mystery. And this was her blood —*hers!*"

He believed that she had been glad to die. He believed—oh, he was sure, that death in his arms —and from his hand—had been sweeter than life could have been—with that wretch—and always without him—her lover! Yes, she had been glad to die. She had been grateful for her escape! And again the dagger drew his fascinated gaze and wrung from his lips the cry, "Her blood—hers! God in Heaven! Her blood!—hers!"

He put his hand to his head with an inarticulate cry of bewilderment. Then, with one supreme effort, he began to stagger hastily but noiselessly about the room. The servants of the house were already astir, and the day would soon be here. He put his sacred letters carefully away, and destroyed all worthless papers, mechanically, but still methodically.

Then he hastily scribbled a few lines, and laid them beside his letters, for Verdayne would be

with him now in a few hours. His father—yes, his own father! How he would like to see him once more—just once more—with the knowledge of their relationship as a closer bond between them —to talk about his mother—his beautiful, queenly mother—and her wonderful, wonderful love! Yet —and he sighed as he thought of his deserted kingdom—after all, all in vain—in vain! It was not to be—all that glory—that triumph! Fate had willed differently. He was obeying the Law!

And his mother would not fail to understand. Verdayne must have loved his mother like this! O God, Love was a fearful thing, he thought, to wreck a life—a terrible thing, even a hideous thing—but in spite of everything it was all that was worth living for—and dying for!

The storm had spent its fury now, and only the steady drip, drip of the rain reminded him of the falling of tears.

"Opal!" he groaned, "Opal!" And he threw himself upon the bed, clasping his dagger in uncontrollable agony. "O life is cruel, hard, bitter! I'll none of it!—we'll none of it, you and I!" His voice grew triumphant in its raving. "It was

worth all the cost—even the sorrow and death! But the end has come! Opal! Opal! I am coming, sweet!—coming!"

And the dagger, still red with the blood of his darling, found its unerring way to his own heart; and Paul Zalenska forgot his dreams, his ambitions, his love, his passion, and his despair in the darkness and quiet of eternal sleep.

"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

CHAPTER XXIX

SIR PAUL VERDAYNE reached Lucerne on the afternoon of the next day. He was as eager as a boy for the reunion with his son. How he loved the Boy—his Boy—the living embodiment of a love that seemed to him greater than any other love the world had ever known.

The storm had ceased and in the brilliancy of the afternoon sunshine little trace of the fury of the night could be seen. Nature smiled radiantly through the tear-drops still glistening on tree and shrub and flower, like some capricious coquette defying the world to prove that she had ever been sad.

To Sir Paul, the place was hallowed with memories of his Queen, and his heart and soul were full of her as he left the train. At the station Vasili awaited him with the news of the double tragedy that had horrified Lucerne.

In that moment, Sir Paul's heart broke. He

grasped at the faithful servitor for a support the old man was scarce able to give. He looked up into the pitying face, grown old and worn in the service of the young King and his heart thrilled, as it ever thrilled, at the sight of the long, cruel scar he remembered so well—the scar which the Kalmuck had received in the service of his Queen, long years before.

Sir Paul loved Vasili for that—loved him even more for the service he had done the world when he choked to death the royal murderer of his Queen, on the fatal night of that tragedy so cruelly alive in his memory. He looked again at the scar on the swarthy face, and yet he knew it was as nothing to the scar made in the old man's heart that day.

In some way—they never knew how—they managed to reach the scene of the tragedy, and Sir Paul, at his urgent request, was left alone with the body of his son.

Oh, God! Could he bear this last blow—and live?

After a time, when reason began to re-assert itself, he searched and found the letters that had

told the Boy-king the story of his birth. Was there no word at all for him—his father?—save the brief telegram he had received the night before?

Ah, yes! here was a note. His Boy had thought of him, then, even at the last. He read it eagerly.

"Father—dear Father—you who alone of all the world can understand—forgive and pity your son who has found the cross too heavy—the crown too thorny—to bear! I go to join my unhappy mother across the river that men call death—and there together we shall await the coming of the husband and father we could neither of us claim in this miserable, gray old world. Father Paul—dearest and best and truest of fathers, your Boy has learned with you the cost of love, and has gladly paid the price—'sorrow and death!'"

He bent again over the cold form, he pushed aside the clustering curls, and kissed again and

again, with all the fervor and pain of a lifetime's repression, the white marble face of his son.

And a few words of that little note rang in his ears unceasingly—"dearest, and best, and *truest* of fathers!" *Truest of fathers!* Ah, yes! The Boy—his Boy—had understood!

And the scalding tears came that were his one salvation, for they washed away for a time some of the deadly ache from his bereaved heart.

When the force of his outburst was spent, Sir Paul Verdayne mastered himself resolutely. There was much to be done. It was indeed a double torture to find such an affliction here, of all places under Heaven, but he told himself that his Queen would have him brave and strong, and master his grief as an English gentleman should. And her wishes were still, as they had ever been, the guide of his every thought and action.

One thing he was determined upon. The world must never know the truth.

To be sure, Sir Paul himself did not know the secret of that one day. He could only surmise. Even Vasili did not know. The Boy had cleverly managed to have the day, as he had the preceding one, "all to himself," as he had informed Vasili, and Opal had been equally skillful in escaping the attendance of her maid. They had left the hotel separately at night, in different directions, returning separately at night. Who was there to suspect that they had passed the day together, or had even met each other at all? Surely—no one!

And what was there for the world to know, in the mystery of their death? Nothing! They were each found alone, stabbed to the heart, and the dagger that had done the deed had not even been withdrawn from the body of the Boy, when they found him. Sir Paul and Vasili had recognized it, but who would dare to insinuate that the same dagger had drunk the blood of the young American lady, or to say whose hand had struck either blow? It was all a mystery, and Sir Paul was determined that it should remain so.

Money can accomplish anything, and though all Europe rang with the story, no scandal—nor hint of it—besmirched the fair fame of the unhappy Boy and girl who had loved "not wisely, but too well!"

There had, indeed, been for them, as they had playfully said—"No to-morrow!"

And Sir Paul Verdayne, kneeling by the bier, with its trappings of a kingdom's mourning, which hid beneath its rich adornment all the joy that life for twenty years had held for him, felt for the first time a sense of guilt, as he looked back upon his past.

He did not regret his love. He could never do that! Truly, a man and a woman had a right to love and mate as they would, if the consequences of their deeds rested only upon their own heads. But to bring children into the world, the fruit of such a union, to suffer and die, "for the sins of the fathers," as his son had suffered and died—there was the sin—a selfish, unpardonable sin! *"And the wages of sin is death."*

He had never felt the truth before. He

had been so happy in his Boy, and so proud of his future, that there had never been a question in his mind. But now he was face to face with the terrible consequences.

"Oh, God!" he cried, "truly my punishment is just—but it is greater than I can bear!"

And Paul Verdayne—what of him? Of course you want to know. Read the sequel

HIGH NOON

A powerful, stirring love-story of twenty years after. Abounding in beautiful descriptions and delicate pathos, this charming love idyl will instantly appeal to the million and a quarter people who have read and enjoyed "Three Weeks." You can get this book from your bookseller, or for 60c., carriage paid, from the publishers

The Macaulay Company, *Publishers*, 15 W. 38th St., New York

Hilda Against the World

By VICTORIA CROSS

Author of

"The Night of Temptation," "To-Morrow," etc.

Victoria Cross has conceived and portrayed what is, perhaps, the most difficult situation on earth. When is marriage not a marriage? The case which she presents may easily arise, and she has blended the fact with her fictitious plot. The characters themselves may be imaginary, but "Hilda Against the World" is none the less a real life story.

We see Hilda Thorne suffering and struggling for purity, and fighting her way from the depths to the light in the final triumph of her better nature. There cannot be two opinions of the range and power of "Hilda Against the World," which is splendidly virile, which looks upon life with open eyes, and which in inception and expression is equal to the best of this brilliant author's past achievements.

Price $1.25 net; Postage 12 Cents

The Macaulay Company, *Publishers*

15 West 38th Street **New York**

The Night of Temptation

By VICTORIA CROSS

Author of
"LIFE'S SHOP WINDOW," "FIVE NIGHTS," etc.

This book takes for its keynote the self-sacrifice of woman in her love. Regina, the heroine, gives herself to a man for his own sake, for the happiness she can give him. He is her hero, her god, and she declines to marry him until she is satisfied that he cannot live without her.

The London *Athenaeum* says: "Granted beautiful, rich, perfect, passionate men and women, the author is capable of working out their destiny."

Price $1.25 net; Postage 12 Cents

The Macaulay Company, *Publishers*

15 West 38th Street **New York**

The Secret of the Night

By GASTON LEROUX

Author of
"THE MYSTERY OF THE YELLOW ROOM," etc.

Another thrilling mystery story in which the famous French detective hero, Joseph Rouletabille, makes his appearance before the public again. This character has won a place in the hearts of novel readers as no other detective has since the creation of Sherlock Holmes.

Thousands upon thousands of people in two continents await eagerly every book by Gaston Leroux that relates the adventures of the hero of "The Mystery of the Yellow Room" and "The Perfume of the Lady in Black."

Price $1.25 net; Postage 12 Cents

The Macaulay Company, *Publishers*
15 West 38th Street **New York**

Guardian Angels

By MARCEL PRÉVOST

Member of the Académie Française, Officer of the Legion of Honour

Author of "SIMPLY WOMEN," Etc.

Every married woman ought to read this novel, if only to be forewarned against a danger that may one day invade her own home. It is a story of the double life led by the governesses of many young girls, showing the dangers of such companionships.

It is no exaggeration to say that "Guardian Angels" is one of the most remarkable novels that have been issued in any language during recent years.

Price $1.25 net; Postage 12 Cents

The Macaulay Company, *Publishers*

15 West 38th Street **New York**

The CROWN NOVELS

FAMOUS BOOKS AT POPULAR PRICES

HER SOUL AND HER BODY, By Louise Closser Hale

The struggle between the spirit and the flesh of a young girl early in life compelled to make her own way. Exposed to the temptations of life in a big city, the contest between her better and lower natures is described with psychological analysis and tender sympathy. Absorbingly interesting.

HELL'S PLAYGROUND, by Ida Vera Simonton

This book deals with primal conditions in a land where "there ain't no ten commandments"; where savagery, naked and unashamed, is not confined to the blacks. It is a record of the life in the African tropics and it is a powerful and fascinating story of a scene that has rarely been depicted in fiction.

THE MYSTERY OF No. 47, by J. Storer Clouston

This is a most ingenious detective story—a thriller in every sense of the word. The reader is led cleverly on until he is at a loss to know what to expect, and, completely baffled, is unable to lay the book down until he has finished the story and satisfied his perplexity.

THE SENTENCE OF SILENCE, by Reginald Wright Kauffman

AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE OF BONDAGE," ETC.

By "The Sentence of Silence" is meant that sentence of reticence pronounced upon the subject of sex. That which means the continuance of the human race is the one thing of which no one is permitted to speak. In this book the subject is dealt with frankly.

THE GIRL THAT GOES WRONG, by Reginald Wright Kauffman

AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE OF BONDAGE."

The inexpressible conditions of human bondage of many young girls and women in our cities demand fearless and uncompromising warfare. The terrible peril that lingers just around the corner from every American home must be stamped out with relentless purpose.

TO-MORROW, by Victoria Cross

Author of "Life's Shop Window," etc.

Critics agree that this is Victoria Cross' greatest novel. Those who have read "Life's Shop Window," "Five Nights," "Anna Lombard," and similar books by this author will ask no further recommendation. "To-morrow" is a real novel—not a collection of short stories.

Wherever you bought this volume you can purchase any other of the Crown Series at the same price; or they can be obtained from the publishers.

THE MACAULAY COMPANY, 15 West 38th St., New York

Send for Illustrated Catalogue

FAMOUS BOOKS AT POPULAR PRICES

THE LIFE SENTENCE, by Victoria Cross

A beautifully written story, full of life, nature, passion, and pathos. A splendid vitality glows throughout this novel, whose characters are depicted with graphic intensity. "The Life Sentence" proclaims anew the author's power of insight into human nature.

THE LURE OF THE FLAME, by Mark Danger

"The book carries a lesson for women that all should learn.

"It is the experience of one who abandoned the path of virtue. The downward path, at first attractive, was swift and fatal. The author has handled a difficult subject with great force and boldness and has eliminated much that is defiling without losing its effectiveness." —*Boston Globe.*

THE FRUIT OF FOLLY, by Violet Craig

Throbbing with human emotion, this book is the record of one woman's mistake. The principal scenes are laid in present day New York, and no more powerful commentary on life in our big centers has been written in a long time.

A WORLD OF WOMEN, by J. D. Beresford

Romantic and dramatic are the situations in this novel. The book is like a dream-garden peopled with women of moving humanity who find themselves in a situation never before conceived. As a result, their impulses and emotions find vent in entirely original ways.

THE WHIP, by Richard Parker

Novelized from Cecil Raleigh's great Drury Lane melodrama of the same name.

BEAUTIFULLY ILLUSTRATED WITH PICTURES FROM THE PLAY

This big love story of English sporting society is crammed full of dramatic incidents. "The Whip" strikes an answering chord of sympathy and interest in every reader. England and America have voted it the big hit of the decade.

ROMANCE, by Acton Davies

The World's Greatest Love Story

Based on Edward Sheldon's Play **Fully Illustrated**

Filled to overflowing with the emotional glamor of love, "Romance" is the romance of a famous grand opera singer and a young clergyman. Despite their different callings they are drawn together by a profound and sincere love. In the hour of trial the woman rises to sublime heights of self-denial.

Wherever you bought this volume you can purchase any other of the Crown Series at the same price; or they can be obtained from the publishers.

THE MACAULAY COMPANY, 15 West 38th St., New York

Send for Illustrated Catalogue

FAMOUS BOOKS AT POPULAR PRICES

THE DANGEROUS AGE, by Karin Michaelis

Here is a woman's soul laid bare with absolute frankness. Europe went mad about the book, which has been translated into twelve languages. It betrays the freemasonry of womanhood.

MY ACTOR HUSBAND, Anonymous

The reader will be startled by the amazing truths set forth and the completeness of their revelations. Life behind the scenes is stripped bare of all its glamor. Young women whom the stage attracts should read this story. There is a ringing damnation in it.

MRS. DRUMMOND'S VOCATION, by Mark Ryce

Lily Drummond is an unmoral (not immoral) heroine. She was not a bad girl at heart; but when chance opened up for her the view of a life she had never known or dreamed of, her absence of moral responsibility did the rest.

DOWNWARD: "A Slice of Life," by Maud Churton Braby

AUTHOR OF "MODERN MARRIAGE AND HOW TO BEAR IT."

"'Downward' belongs to that great modern school of fiction built upon woman's downfall. * * * I cordially commend this bit of fiction to the thousands of young women who are yearning to see what they call life.'"—*James L. Ford in the N. Y. Herald.*

TWO APACHES OF PARIS, by Alice and Claude Askew

AUTHORS OF "THE SHULAMITE," "THE ROD OF JUSTICE," ETC.

All primal struggles originate with the daughters of Eve.

This story of Paris and London tells of the wild, fierce life of the flesh, of a woman with the beauty of consummate vice to whom a man gave himself, body and soul.

THE VISITS OF ELIZABETH, by Elinor Glyn

One of Mrs. Glyn's biggest successes. Elizabeth is a charming young woman who is always saying and doing droll and daring things, both shocking and amusing.

BEYOND THE ROCKS, by Elinor Glyn

"One of Mrs. Glyn's highly sensational and somewhat erotic novels."—*Boston Transcript.*

The scenes are laid in Paris and London; and a country-house party also figures, affording the author some daring situations, which she has handled deftly.

THE REFLECTIONS OF AMBROSINE, by Elinor Glyn

The story of the awakening of a young girl, whose maidenly emotions are set forth as Elinor Glyn alone knows how.

"Gratitude and power and self-control! * * * in nature I find there is a stronger force than all these things, and that is the touch of the one we love."—Ambrosine.

Wherever you bought this volume you can purchase any other of the Crown Series at the same price; or they can be obtained from the publishers.

THE MACAULAY COMPANY, 15 West 38th St., New York

Send for Illustrated Catalogue

FAMOUS BOOKS AT POPULAR PRICES

THE VICISSITUDES OF EVANGELINE, by Elinor Glyn

"One of Mrs. Glyn's most pungent tales of feminine idiosyncracy and caprice."—*Boston Transcript.*

Evangeline is a delightful heroine with glorious red hair and amazing eyes that looked a thousand unsaid challenges.

DAYBREAK: a Prologue to "Three Weeks"

"Daybreak" is a prologue to "Three Weeks" and forms the first of the series, although published last. It is a highly interesting account of a love episode that took place during the youth of the famous Queen of "Three Weeks."

A story of the Balkans, this is one of the timely novels of the year.

ONE DAY: a Sequel to "Three Weeks"

"There is a note of sincerity in this book that is lacking in the first."—*Boston Globe.*

"One Day" is the sequel you have been waiting for since reading "Three Weeks," and is a story which points a moral, a clear, well-written exposition of the doctrine, "As ye sow, so shall ye reap."

HIGH NOON: a New Sequel to "Three Weeks"

A Modern Romeo and Juliet

A powerful, stirring love-story of twenty years after. Abounding in beautiful descriptions and delicate pathos, this charming love idyl will instantly appeal to the million and a quarter people who have read and enjoyed "Three Weeks."

THE DIARY OF MY HONEYMOON

A woman who sets out to unburden her soul upon intimate things is bound to touch upon happenings which are seldom the subject of writing at all; but whatever may be said of the views of the anonymous author, the "Diary" is a work of throbbing and intense humanity, the moral of which is sound throughout and plain to see.

THE INDISCRETION OF LADY USHER: a Sequel to "The Diary of My Honeymoon"

"Another purpose novel dealing with the question of marriage and dealing very plainly,—one of the most interesting among the many books on these lines which are at present attracting so much attention."—*Cleveland Town Topics.*

Wherever you bought this volume you can purchase any other of the Crown Series at the same price; or they can be obtained from the publishers.

THE MACAULAY COMPANY, 15 West 38th St., New York

Send for Illustrated Catalogue

FAMOUS BOOKS AT POPULAR PRICES

SIMPLY WOMEN, by Marcel Prévost

"Like a motor-car or an old-fashioned razor, this book should be in the hands of mature persons only."—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch.*

"Marcel Prévost, of whom a critic remarked that his forte was the analysis of the souls and bodies of a type half virgin and half courtesan, is now available in a volume of selections admirably translated by R. I. Brandon-Vauvillez."—*San Francisco Chronicle.*

THE ADVENTURES OF A NICE YOUNG MAN, by Aix

Joseph and Potiphar's Wife Up-to-Date

A handsome young man, employed as a lady's private secretary, is bound, to meet with interesting adventures.

"Under a thin veil the story unquestionably sets forth actual episodes and conditions in metropolitan circles."—*Washington Star.*

HER REASON, Anonymous

This startling anonymous work of a well-known English novelist is a frank exposure of Modern Marriage. "Her Reason" shows the deplorable results of the process at work to-day among the rich, whose daughters are annually offered for sale in the markets of the world.

THE COUNTERPART, by Horner Cotes

One of the best novels of the Civil War ever written. John Luther Long, the well-known writer, says of this book—"It is a perfectly bully story and full of a fine sentiment. I have read it all—and with great interest."

THE PRINCESS OF FORGE, by George C. Shedd

The tale of a man, and a maid, and a gold-mine—a stirring, romantic American novel of the West. *The Chicago Inter-Ocean* says—"Unceasing action is the word for this novel. From the first to the last page there is adventure."

OUR LADY OF DARKNESS, by Albert Dorrington and A. G. Stephens

A story of the Far East. *The Grand Rapids Herald* says of the book—" 'Our Lady of Darkness' is entitled to be classed with 'The Count of Monte Cristo.' It is one of the greatest stories of mystery and deep-laid plot and its masterly handling must place it in the front rank of modern fiction."

THE DUPLICATE DEATH, by A. C. Fox-Davies

A first-rate detective story—one that will keep you thrilled to the very end. *The New York Tribune's* verdict on the book is this—"We need only commend it as a puzzling and readable addition to the fiction of crime."

Wherever you bought this volume you can purchase any other of the Crown Series at the same price; or they can be obtained from the publishers.

THE MACAULAY COMPANY, 15 West 38th St., New York

Send for Illustrated Catalogue